America

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THE JESUIT REVIEW OF FAITH AND CULTURE

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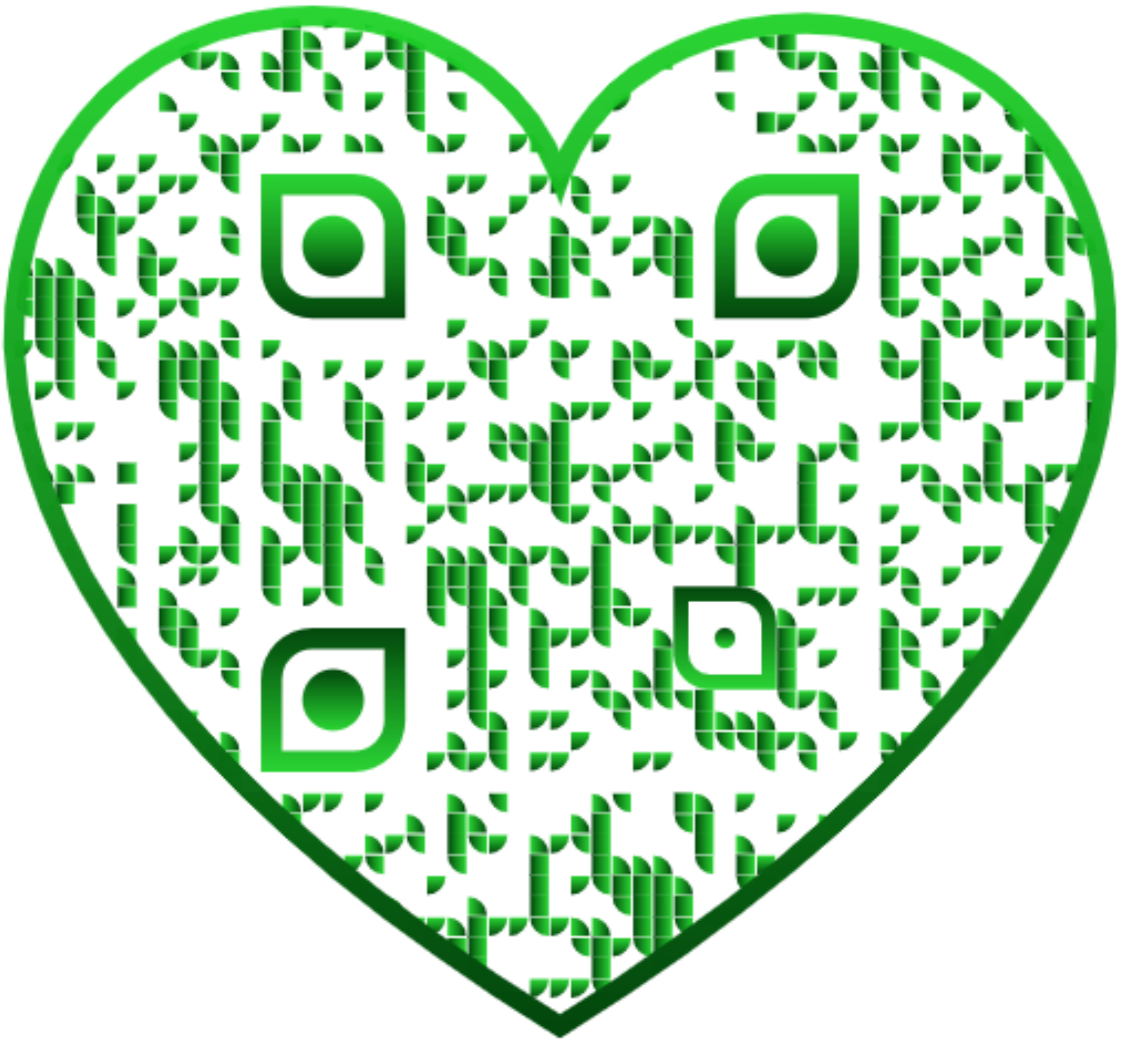

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The End of an Era?

As I write this column, the U.S. House of Representatives is on the verge of impeaching President Donald J. Trump for his role in instigating the riotous insurrection of Jan. 6, 2021. Those of you who follow **America**'s digital reporting and analysis will know that impeachment was endorsed by **America**'s editors on Jan. 11. In calling for the impeachment of a sitting president for only the third time since our founding in 1909, the editors wrote:

> To be sure, impeachment and conviction are impractical and unlikely to be successfully concluded during the relatively few days that remain in Mr. Trump's term. But such an outcome is not impossible, and any delay whatsoever would be a profoundly unwise substitution of tactical calculation for constitutional principle. The damage Mr. Trump has caused is without precedent, and our legislators should brook no delay in holding him to full account and thereby establishing a standard of acceptable behavior for future presidents.
>
> In the wake of Mr. Trump's unprecedented assault on the constitutional order, Congress must act now, if for no other reason than to register with the high court of history the nation's collective revulsion, as well as its commitment to ensuring that such a depraved and perfidious abuse of the presidential office never again besmirches the character of the nation.

A report in The New York Times on Jan. 13 that several prominent Republicans now support the impeachment process, may indicate that impeachment and conviction are not as "impractical and unlikely" as the editorial suggests. Regardless of the outcome, I believe that history will record that during this time of national crisis, **America** stood not only on the side of right but on the right side of history.

And yet that is not wholly satisfying, perhaps because I suspect that Mr. Trump's departure from the White House, by whatever means, will not itself bridge the gaping divisions these events have further revealed.

René Girard, the late literary critic and philosopher, once described what he called "the scapegoat mechanism." Mr. Girard's thesis was that a human community, particularly its culture, is formed in part through scapegoating—a process by which a group defines itself over against an individual. Perhaps that much is obvious to you, as it is to me. What is not so obvious are two additional points Mr. Girard made: first, that the individual scapegoat need not be morally guilty or innocent for the mechanism to cause the desired effect; and, second, the effect—the sense of peace or stability created by the purge of the scapegoat— does not last. Soon divisions within the community remerge, and the cycle of escalating rivalries begins anew.

If Mr. Girard was right, that does not mean that Mr. Trump is not responsible for his actions or that he should not be impeached and convicted. It does mean, though, that we must recognize the limits of that process. Mr. Trump's departure from Washington, D.C., will not heal the country in the ways we tend to think it will. The cycle of rivalry and violence will likely recur.

Mr. Girard believed, however, that while deep-seated and seemingly intractable, the cycle is not inevitable. There is a different way, one that reduces the likelihood of violence. That way is the Gospel. As I once put it in another context, "if we are able to build a completely just world tomorrow, in terms of our social structures, but are not loving and forgiving one another, then we will have failed. And if we think we are going to build a more just world without the radical acts of love and forgiveness to which the Gospel testifies, then we are deluded."

Surely, we do not bear the same share of individual responsibility for these events, but the truth is that all of us bear some responsibility. As hard as that may be to admit, it is a necessary step. To put it another way: The path to communion begins by admitting what we have done and what we failed to do. So for the church. So for the country.

•••

I am pleased to announce the debut of a new section in this issue. Jesuit Schools Spotlight will feature news and analysis about the work of the dozens of Jesuit-sponsored primary and secondary schools in North America. I am grateful for the coalition of Jesuit-sponsored schools whose advertising support helps make this coverage possible.

Matt Malone, S.J.
Twitter: @americaeditor.

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CNS photo/Erin Scott, Reuters

The U.S. Capitol in Washington is seen behind security fencing on Jan. 7, one day after supporters of President Donald Trump stormed Capitol Hill.

Cover: Mary Lou Williams, circa 1946
William P. Gottlieb/Alamy

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The Capitol riot: "I fell to my knees"

The assault on the national Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, will be remembered as one of the most despicable events in U.S. history. Below is a selection of reader comments from across **America**'s coverage of the riot.

I fell to my knees when I saw the images of the assault on the Capitol, cried, and prayed to God that it stop. My next thoughts went to my father and his fellow military members and their sacrifices during World War II to wipe out Nazism and facism. I am glad the majority of them did not live to witness this— and am painfully sorry to those of them who did.
Sara Beis

How do we as Christians, however fervent, understand renegades, some of whom assaulted the Capitol Police, carried Confederate flags, made a gallows, left pipe bombs and plotted handcuffing members of Congress, even Mr. Pence? What of those who have peddled untruths to curry favor and undermine democracy (and perhaps try again)? Overall, I'm reminded of remarks at the end of *Moby-Dick,* when Starbuck scorns the brutal hunt a deranged Captain Ahab has led. "In Jesus' name no more of this," the first mate cries, "that's worse than devil's madness. Shall we be towed by him to the infernal world?" Here on the precipice, caring matters—but first, we must insure this never recurs.
R. Jay Allain

[Jan. 6] has proved beyond any doubt that character counts. All the party-before-country voters who found Trump's behavior repugnant but supported him anyway helped to create this assault on our democracy. Today's travesty cannot be brushed aside, as so many others were. Trump and his enablers need to be held accountable, and we need to vow never again to look the other way when corruption stares us in the face.
Fran Abbot

Among the many devastating moments of the day was the sight of an enormous cross being hoisted by ropes maneuvered by the president's supporters. As I watched them struggle with the cross, I had a thought that strikes me simultaneously as surely sacrilegious as their action but also likely true: almost certainly those who took the final steps in the sacrifice of Jesus would have struggled to hoist and steady that cross, too. I am not smart enough to tease that out in any way that might be meaningful for others but I know what I saw: the desecration of Christianity and the near-sacrifice of American democracy.
J. Jones

What saddens me is that so many millions have embraced the hypocrisy, hatred and division of this presidency because it has been wrapped in a pro-life cloak. A year ago, the president spoke at the March for Life in the same vicinity where on Jan. 6 he stoked and inflamed hatred, division and violence.
Gary Dowsey

Mr. Trump must be held accountable, but all the Republicans in the House and Senate who supported his bogus claims, especially Senators Hawley and Cruz, must also be held accountable. They knew full well that Trump's claims were bogus. They could easily have defused the situation by telling the truth.

Four years ago the Republican party truly made a Faustian bargain with Trump to further their desire to appoint lifetime conservative judges and to benefit the wealthy. At the time of Trump's impeachment, the Republicans, except for Senator Mitt Romney, gave Trump a pass. He alone appealed to his Christian faith to support one of the impeachment charges. Where were all the other Christians who had also taken an oath before God to uphold the Constitution?
John Dahmus

One only has to recall the actions of the president in June when he ordered National Guard troops to disperse the peaceful Black Lives Matter protest in Washington, D.C., because he wanted to pose with a Bible in front of a church. Place that next to the easy access protesters gained yesterday to the Nation's Capitol. This is an issue of race, and it is disheartening and disturbing that our nation's leader is condoning violent behavior.
Boreta Singleton

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Get the vaccine—as an act of charity and an act of solidarity

The coronavirus vaccines are finally here. Not enough doses are here yet, and the vaccine rollout has been painfully slow in the United States, as distribution efforts have been plagued by confusion, frustration and logistical tie-ups. But people are receiving their first doses. Already we see some first providers, medical professionals and politicians sharing photos of themselves being vaccinated. Major urban centers are now expanding eligibility for the vaccines developed by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna to include teachers, corrections officers, the elderly and immunocompromised individuals.

The vaccines come not a moment too soon. Infections, hospitalizations and deaths from Covid-19 have soared to record heights in recent weeks; 375,000 Americans have now died from the virus and another 23 million have been infected. Hospitals and medical workers around the country are overwhelmed, and many other health concerns have been neglected by individuals and communities because there are simply not enough beds or doctors. Elective surgeries, preventative care and the treatment of lesser but still severe medical conditions have declined significantly throughout the nation, with sure and certain long-term effects on our health even if Covid-19 can be eradicated.

While it is important for leaders to think through who gets a vaccine and when, the decision facing most Americans is, "Should I get the vaccine when it is my turn?" The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in its statement on Dec. 11 rightly described getting vaccinated as an "act of charity." It is also an act of solidarity.

Getting vaccinated not only decreases one's chances of infecting someone else—something that even otherwise healthy people can easily and unknowingly do—but also sends an important public signal to people who belong to high-risk populations that we are doing our part to keep them safe: health care workers, first responders, food service workers, the elderly, prisoners and the poor. "Being vaccinated safely against Covid-19," said the U.S.C.C.B. statement, "should be considered an act of love of our neighbor and part of our moral responsibility for the common good."

Pope Francis, who received a vaccination in late January, offered even stronger words in a recent interview with an Italian television station: "I believe that ethically everyone must take the vaccine. It is not an option; it is an ethical action, because you are playing with your health, you are playing with your life, but you are also playing with the lives of others."

Particularly heartening was the news from the Archdiocese of Miami on Dec. 16 that Archbishop Thomas Wenski had received a vaccine, the first U.S. bishop to do so. "I wanted to demonstrate confidence in the vaccine that was approved and authorized by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration," Archbishop Wenski wrote in an online essay for **America**, "and to underscore that as Catholics we have no ethical concerns about the vaccine." This is especially important because a small number of church leaders have sowed confusion by spreading information contrary to the assurance of the U.S.C.C.B. that vaccines may and should be taken.

Archbishop Wenski's statement also points to a troubling prospect the country faces in the next six months or more. For the vaccines to help bring the pandemic to an end—to allow us to reopen our churches, schools and workplaces—a significant portion of the population must be vaccinated. But large numbers of Americans are reluctant to do so. News reports in January noted that some vaccination sites were forced to discard viable doses at the end of the day because not enough eligible recipients were showing up to be inoculated. A recent report from the Pew Research Forum showed that as many as 39 percent of the population still plan to forgo getting vaccinated. But as A. David Paltiel, a professor at the Yale School of Public Health, told The New York Times: "Vaccines don't save lives. Vaccination programs save lives."

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith repeated and strengthened the U.S.C.C.B.'s support for the vaccines on Dec. 21, declaring it is morally acceptable to take Covid-19 vaccines whose development or testing regimen includes cell lines originating from aborted fetuses when alternatives are not available. Since 2005, this has also been the position of the Pontifical Academy for Life with regard to the MMR vaccine given to children to prevent mumps, measles and rubella, derived through similar means.

Further, though the document stated that "practical reason makes evident that vaccination is not, as a rule, a moral obligation and that, therefore, it must be voluntary," the authors also argued that "from the ethical point of view, *the morality of vaccination depends not only on the duty to protect one's own health, but also on the duty to pursue the common good.* In the absence of other means to stop or even

prevent the epidemic, the common good may recommend vaccination, especially to protect the weakest and most exposed."

This is not just a question of political persuasion. A recent survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that while more than 40 percent of Republicans surveyed said they were hesitant to get a vaccine, the numbers were almost as high for Black adults, who may be wary because the United States has a long history of medical professionals providing substandard care to Black Americans or even using them for experimental treatments without their consent.

For its part, the C.D.F. did not weigh in on "the safety and efficacy of these vaccines, although ethically relevant and necessary." Distrust of government assurances that the vaccines are safe and will not have side effects is a prominent reason. Lurking behind that distrust is an increasing lack of trust generally throughout U.S. society: trust in one another, in experts, in the news, in institutions. The horrific actions of the seditious mob that ransacked the U.S. Capitol in January showed how deeply that distrust has penetrated the hearts of many Americans. This will probably stay with us after this pandemic is over.

So what can we do to help increase confidence in the vaccines—and thereby drive up their effectiveness? While we have an obligation to listen to people's questions about vaccines and answer them with charity and compassion, it is also true that dispelling misinformation is a spiritual work of mercy.

We will surely benefit if all our prominent national and local leaders—Catholic bishops and priests among them—are crystal clear about the safety of the vaccines while also making clear that receiving one is an act of charity as well as solidarity.

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Microplastics in placentas: This is a pro-life issue

My oldest daughter—now 7—was born on April 22, Earth Day, and she has accepted this as a propitious coincidence. Each year, she organizes her younger siblings and friends for a celebration of her Earth Day-Birthday, which includes some sort of care-for-creation activity, such as cleaning up the litter cluttering her favorite duck pond. It is always a big hit.

Once, as I reflected on the way the kids participate so enthusiastically in these acts of reviving the health and beauty of our planet, I was struck by a thought: Perhaps their innate sense of connection to the Earth comes from the fact that children are conceived and nurtured for their first 40 weeks within a purely organic environment. I found this to be a lovely idea.

But this idea is challenged by an article in the January issue of the journal Environment International, which reveals that scientists have, for the first time, discovered microplastics in human placentas—creating a kind of "Plasticenta," as the title of the article puts it. The particles were identified as the residue of "paints, coatings, adhesives, plasters, polymers and cosmetics and personal care products." A total of 12 particles were found in four placentas, out of six donated to Italian scientists.

Apparently, there really is no place uninhabited by these tiny polymers. They have been found on the peak of Mount Everest and in the deepest trench of the ocean, and now it appears that our children are being formed in wombs infused with inorganic material.

While images of birds and marine animals with stomachs full of plastic have become all too common in recent years, it is difficult to imagine human children surrounded by plastic during their prenatal development. The microplastics found in placentas do not take up the same amount of space, of course—microplastics are defined as being less than five millimeters in size, and the dozen discovered in the study were each 5 to 10 micrometers, using a unit of measurement equal to one-millionth of a meter—but they are known to be toxic.

It has been clear for many years that the overuse of plastic is harmful. First, the production of plastic involves oil-based chemicals, a leading contributor to humanity's massive carbon footprint, which is a driver of climate change. Then, disposed plastic products help to destroy ecosystems and to endanger animals, killing millions every year. Further, the chemicals contained in plastics can leach into foods and beverages, causing a range of human health problems, such as cancer, reproductive issues, metabolic disorders, asthma and neurodevelopmental conditions.

Though more research is necessary to determine the effect of plastics on prenatal development, their presence in the placenta is a matter of urgent concern. Specifically, the Italian researchers worry that microplastics "may alter several cellular regulating pathways in placenta," which could interfere with the implantation of the embryo, fetal growth and development, maternal-fetal communication and more. All these effects could induce serious, long-lasting, and potentially fatal health and developmental complications in mothers and their children.

Despite these known harms, the global production of plastics continues to rise. National Geographic reports that half of all plastics ever made have been produced since 2005, and production is expected to double again by 2050. The Covid-19 pandemic has not helped matters, as it is projected that more than 1.5 billion single-use masks made with polypropylene and other plastics polluted the ocean last year alone.

With the discovery of microplastics in human placentas, we can no longer look at environmental degradation as separate from, or tangential to, pro-life issues. Any person who values fetal life must not only fight against abortion but also advocate for environmental protections. Members of both major political parties should be engaged in this endeavor.

Pope Francis tells us in "Laudato Si'" that "we are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental," and throughout his papacy he has been exhorting the faithful to view the world with an integral vision. In *Let Us Dream* he urges us to "practice an integral ecology, allowing the principle of ecological regeneration to shape the decisions we take at every level."

Though the political divide in the United States has made it seem impossible to value unborn life while promoting policies that are eco-friendly, Catholics are called to traverse this divide and do both—because the two are intrinsically interconnected. If we have the courage to do this, the political and atmospheric climates will improve, as will the health and wellbeing of children in utero and across the globe.

Kathleen Bonnette *is the assistant director of the Office of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation for the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Atlantic-Midwest Province.*

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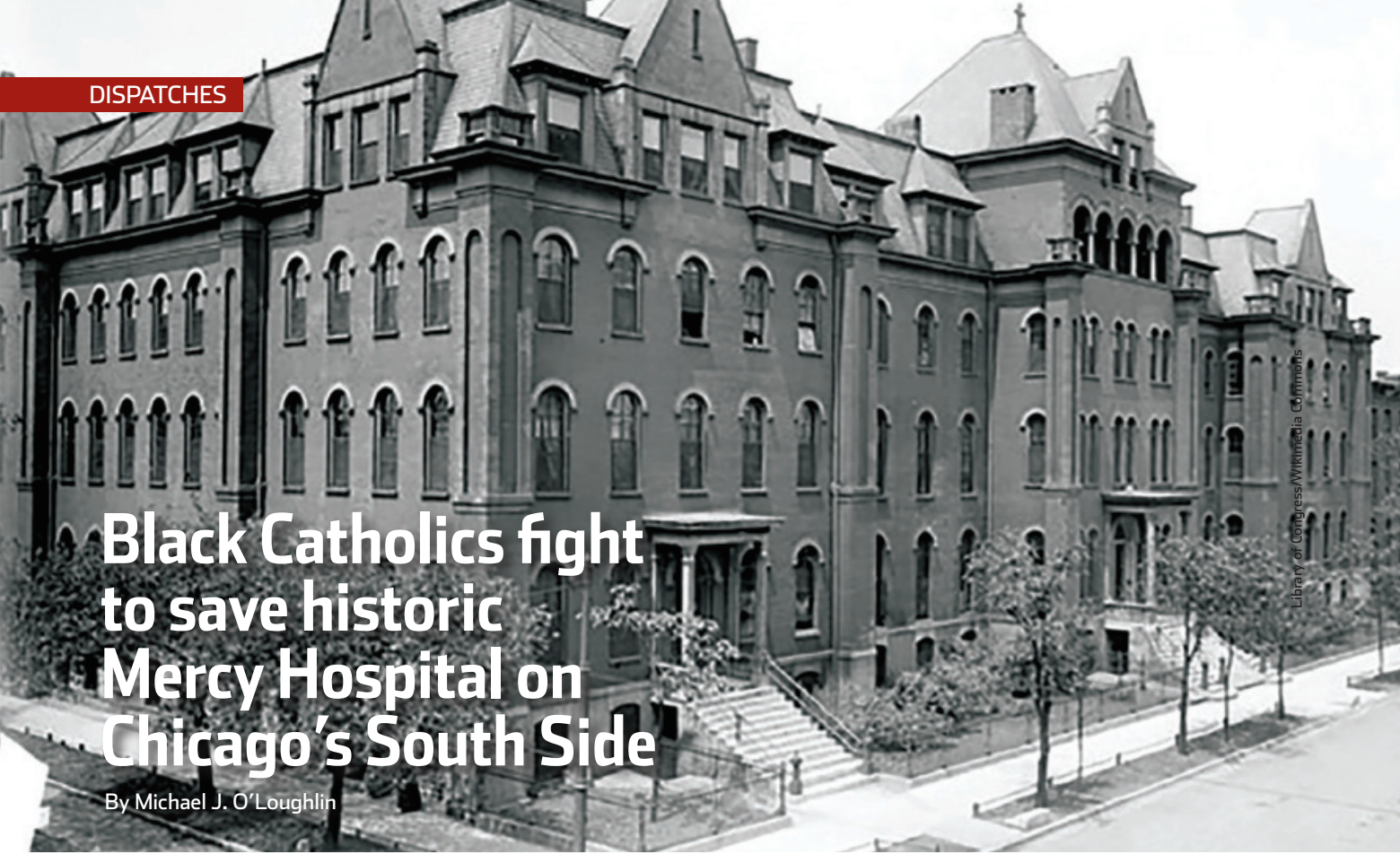

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Black Catholics fight to save historic Mercy Hospital on Chicago's South Side

By Michael J. O'Loughlin

Chicago's oldest hospital, founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1852, may soon be relegated to history. Citing years of financial struggle, structural changes in health care and a lack of support from government leaders, Trinity Health, Mercy's Michigan-based parent, announced last summer that the 412-bed hospital, located in a predominantly Black neighborhood, would close its doors in 2021.

A group of neighborhood activists are trying to convince state lawmakers and Trinity Health to save the storied institution, arguing that closing a hospital in an underserved community during a pandemic is unconscionable and calling Mercy's survival a matter of racial justice. On Dec. 16 a state commission rejected Mercy's application to close, offering at least a temporary hope to community members who want to see the hospital stay open.

But Mercy Hospital officials intend to make their case for a shutdown to the board "again in early 2021," citing a plan after Mercy's doors close "to transition to an outpatient model to serve residents on the South Side of Chicago."

"As an African-American male who was born here in the city of Chicago, when I see an injustice, like when a local hospital is being closed that serves the poor, elderly, people of color and people with chronic diseases, it needs to be addressed," the Rev. Mr. Alfred Coleman said.

Mr. Coleman serves as a deacon at Saint James Catholic Church in Chicago's predominantly Black neighborhood of Bronzeville, about a half mile from Mercy Hospital. A group of parishioners there has been involved in demonstrations urging a state regulatory board to reject the request to close the hospital.

"This side of town is considered a food desert, and now it will be a health care desert," Mr. Coleman said.

Activists blame political leaders in Illinois as well as Trinity Health for the failure to keep Mercy Hospital open. A network of more than 90 hospitals in 22 states, Trinity reported more than $8 billion in cash on hand in 2020 before the coronavirus pandemic hit.

Should Trinity Health win its appeal and receive approval to close the hospital, activists fear the disparities in health care between the predominantly white North Side of Chicago and the predominantly Black South Side will be exacerbated. The nearest emergency department would be a few miles away from Mercy's current campus, and the loss of a trusted hospital could add to the feeling of distrust some Black Americans feel toward health care providers because of historic injustices.

Mercy Hospital is considered a "safety-net hospital," serving a patient population that primarily relies on government health insurance. In recent years, safety-net

hospitals throughout the United States have struggled to stay afloat as wealthier patients with private insurance seek care at large, urban academic medical centers. About three-quarters of Mercy's patients use Medicare or Medicaid, which reimburses hospitals at lower rates than private insurers. Mercy Hospital lost about $84 million between 2012 and 2020.

Jitu Brown, along with three of his siblings, was born at Mercy Hospital. He is head of the Kenwood Oakland Community Organization. He said that leaders at Trinity Health should not have allowed Mercy Hospital's financial situation to become so bleak.

"They should have never allowed it to get to this point," Mr. Jitu said. "That's when you connect with community groups, unions, and you demand at the state level that they fix the funding system so that it's equitable and so safety-net hospitals are not always on the verge of closure."

"Mercy has a long history in Chicago of providing compassionate care to those in need," Mike Slubowski, the head of Trinity Health, said in a press release. "While the way in which patients receive that care might change over the years, our mission to serve the most vulnerable among us remains the same." Trinity Health, which acquired Mercy Hospital in 2011, announced in November that it intends to open an urgent care center not far from Mercy Hospital.

Trinity Health did not reply to requests for comment.

The chief executive officer of Mercy Hospital, Carol Schneider, said in a statement in October that the planned closure and the opening of a new clinic were essential to meet the needs of South Side residents.

"While closing the hospital is an incredibly tough decision, it is the right one, and one that will allow us to best continue our Catholic mission of providing access to health care for poor and underserved patients," she said. "This transformation will allow us to continue this mission with the proposed outpatient center that will provide necessary services that patients on the South Side today need."

Mercy Hospital has served Chicago for more than a century and a half. According to The Chicago Tribune, Mercy treated victims of the Great Chicago Fire and cared for President Theodore Roosevelt after he was shot in Milwaukee in 1912. It was the site of the first successful separation of twins conjoined at the head and the birthplace of countless Chicagoans, including Mayor Richard M. Daley.

Sister Patricia M. Murphy helped found a community outreach program at Mercy Hospital in the early 1970s. She said the Sisters of Mercy decided to leave the hospital walls and go out into the community to make sure the predominantly poor and elderly population who lived in nearby public housing received quality medical care at the hospital.

In the first couple of years of the program, Sister Murphy said, she and other members of the team knocked on some 19,000 doors. At Christmas, she and other volunteers delivered meals to the homes of Mercy's patients. It was a true community, she recalled.

But today, she said, it seems no one wants to pay for health care for people in need.

"There's still a need for a hospital. There is no money for health care for the poor," she said. "I think we could find it from many other things. But health care for the poor, the money just does not exist."

Sister June Anselme worked on the outreach program for 43 years before she retired from Mercy Hospital in 2010, one of the last two Sisters of Mercy employed by the hospital. She said she recognizes the financial realities of providing care to people in need without increased government support but called it "sad" that the community would be left without a trusted hospital, especially as the United States begins the largest vaccination effort in its history.

"Where are these people going to go?" she asked. "I don't know. Maybe they have a plan. Maybe they're going to be cared for. But that area is in need."

Mr. Brown said he and other residents of Chicago's South Side are tired of fighting for basic necessities that other taxpayers take for granted, like grocery stores, well-resourced schools and hospitals. If political and civic leaders are serious about racial equity, he said, they need to step up when it comes to protecting vital institutions.

"It is inexcusable that we've been at this place. It is a blistering lack of leadership," Mr. Brown said. "Because we don't need people to say 'Black lives matter' at press conferences. This is when Black lives matter, when talking about how institutions function in our communities."

Michael J. O'Loughlin, *national correspondent.*
Twitter: @MikeOLoughlin.

Who will be the first Black Catholic saint from the United States?

Despite the presence of Black Catholics in the United States since the late 17th century, none of the 11 saints associated with the United States are of African descent. An initiative by the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans, the nation's first historically Black Catholic college, intends to change that. "The canonization of African Americans," Reynold Verrett, president of Xavier University, told HuffPost, "is a profound and a precious affirmation of God's love for all mankind and significantly would affirm God's Black creation."

Pierre Toussaint

1776-1853

Mr. Toussaint came to New York in 1787 with the family that held him as an enslaved person, seeking to escape the violence of political revolution in Haiti. He worked as a hairdresser. He later became a formidable fundraiser for Catholic charities throughout the United States, especially in support of Black Catholics. He opened the first Black Catholic school in New York and raised funds to start the first Catholic orphanage in the city. When yellow fever broke out, many in power fled the city for the countryside to escape infection, but Mr. Toussaint remained in the city to serve the sick and dying.

For more information, visit: **tinyurl.com/venerable-toussaint.**

Mother Mary Elizabeth Lange, O.S.P.

circa 1784-1882

After fleeing the revolution in her native Haiti with her family to Cuba, Mother Lange moved to Baltimore, Md., in 1813 with money she received from her merchant father. There she used her wealth to provide free schooling to Caribbean migrant children at a time when it was illegal for enslaved people to receive an education. Following Emancipation, she opened a school for girls of color in 1828 and asked permission to establish a religious congregation for Black Catholic women. When the Oblate Sisters of Providence were founded in 1829, Mother Lange served as its first provincial superior. The sisters educated Black children and illiterate adults, cared for widows and orphans and offered succor to many people during the cholera epidemic of the 1830s and '40s.

For more information, visit: **www.motherlange.org.**

Henriette Delille, S.S.F.

1813-1862

A nurse, teacher and caregiver for the impoverished of New Orleans, La.—many of whom were Black, enslaved women and children—Ms. Delille founded a religious order of consecrated women in 1837. The Sisters of the Holy Family welcomed senior women into their home, caring for them through serious sickness and death, especially during the yellow fever epidemic of 1853, when 8,000 died. At a time when educating them was forbidden by law, she opened schools for enslaved children of color. In 2010, Pope Benedict XVI recognized her holiness and moved her one step closer to official sainthood, thereby confirming what was said in her obituary: "For the love of Jesus Christ she had become the humble and devout servant of the slaves."

For more information, visit: **tinyurl.com/henriette-delille.**

Augustus Tolton

1854-97

The first publicly acknowledged Black diocesan priest from the United States was denied entry into any of the country's seminaries and forced to pursue studies for the priesthood in Rome. After ordination in 1886, Father Tolton asked to serve as a missionary in Africa, hoping to escape the racism in his native land. Instead, he was told to return to Quincy, Ill., to which he and his mother had fled after being released from enslavement in Missouri. As a pastor there, he endured the racist attitudes and actions of the local white Catholic clergy. In 1889, Archbishop Patrick Feehan of Chicago invited him to minister to the city's Black Catholics. By 1894 Father Tolton had built and developed St. Monica, a Black Catholic parish of about 600 people that became a national beacon for Black ministry.

For more information, visit: **tolton.archchicago.org.**

Julia Greeley

between 1833 and 1848-1918

Born into enslavement in Hannibal, Mo., she moved to Denver around 1878 after gaining her freedom and worked as a housekeeper. The little money she earned is said to have been spent almost entirely on care for the disenfranchised. To spare white families the embarrassment of receiving charity from a Black woman, she often carried out her charitable service at night. Ms. Greeley was baptized and received into the Catholic Church at the Jesuit parish of the Sacred Heart. In 1901, the "angel of Denver," as she became known, professed vows in the Secular Franciscan Order, remaining faithful to her promises until her death in her 80s.

For more information, visit: **juliagreeley.org.**

Thea Bowman, F.S.P.A.

1937-90

Few people have tried to get U.S. bishops to stand together and sing, but in 1989 that's exactly what this daughter of a physician and a teacher from Canton, Miss., was able to achieve. Inspired by the actions of the women religious and priests at her school, she became a Catholic when still a young girl. At 15 she joined the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, becoming the order's first Black member. She earned a doctorate from the Catholic University of America in 1972 and was a founding member of the Institute for Black Catholic Studies at Xavier University in New Orleans. A teacher, singer, writer and evangelizer, she delivered public lectures across the country as a sharp critic of racism. She died in 1990 of complications from bone and breast cancer.

For more information, visit: **www.sistertheabowman.com.**

Ricardo da Silva, S.J., *associate editor. Twitter: @ricdssj.*

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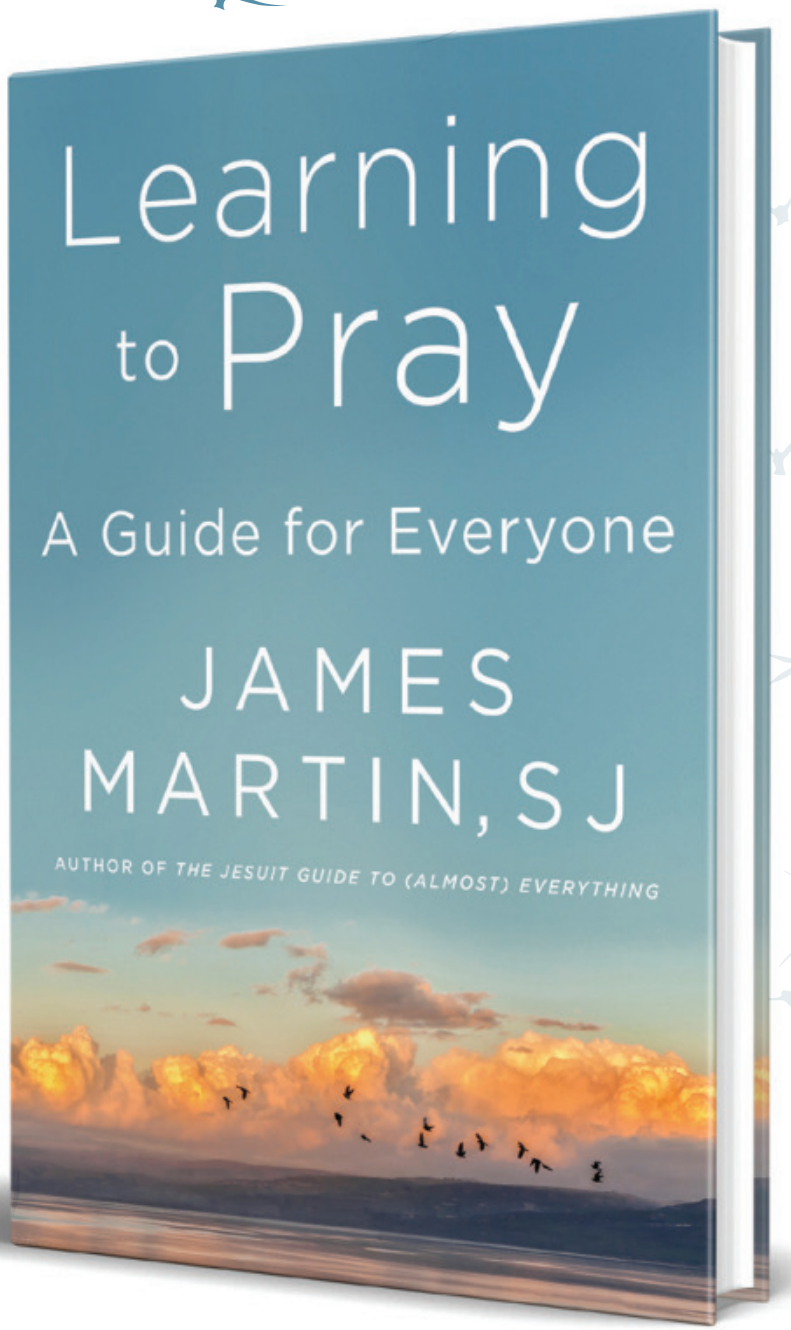


Photo courtesy of Catholic Action Montreal

GOODNEWS: What's in a name? Montreal church puts 'Catholic' back to work in community service

Volunteers from Catholic Action Montreal help children of asylum seekers gear up for their first cold winter walk.

Catholicism can be a tough sell in Quebec, a province of Canada that rapidly secularized in the 1960s. In 2015 Catholic Community Services, the social services agency for Montreal's English-speaking Catholic community, excised "Catholic" from its name and identity, rebranding itself Collective Community Services.

Bishop Thomas Dowd, then an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese of Montreal and now the leader of the Diocese of Sault Sainte Marie in the province of Ontario, explained that the agency had been concerned about losing funding from a foundation that "was very ambiguous regarding its openness to religion and funding religious organizations."

"The question is: 'Do you change who you are to make sure you keep getting funding? How do you maintain your identity in the face of those kinds of stresses?'"

After the name change, Bishop Dowd and others insisted there needed to be something uniquely Catholic to replace the church's former social services agency. "The church cannot withdraw from the field of charity," he said. But the archdiocese did want to avoid recreating the same challenges.

"We realized that part of the issue was actually the conceptual model for providing services, which seems to be: We fundraise and then we use the money to hire some experts to provide care," said Bishop Dowd.

"My model is different," he said. His idea "is to create a system that is massively engaged with as many people as possible getting involved."

The desire for a new kind of church-led social services organization prompted Bishop Dowd and others to create Catholic Action Montreal, a grassroots initiative that began in 2015 to connect people and services across the city. (The use of the term Catholic Action is not meant to suggest this is a revival of the historical movement that grew in the 20th century, though Bishop Dowd affirmed that C.A.M. reflects "the same inspiration and spirit.")

Anna Graham, a founding member of C.A.M. and chairperson of its board of directors, described the organization as a "means by which we can connect individuals to opportunities to serve the needs of the community." Its strength is in building relationships, including among the various organizations within Montreal, "learning who they are and what need they serve," she said.

Bishop Dowd offered a unique analogy for the vision behind C.A.M. Referring to a famous 20th-century printed encyclopedia, he said: "The typical client-server model was like Britannica: written by experts, erudite, professional. And there's nothing wrong with that. But we wanted Wikipedia. The creators of Wikipedia did not actually create an encyclopedia, they created a platform that allowed for massive collaboration."

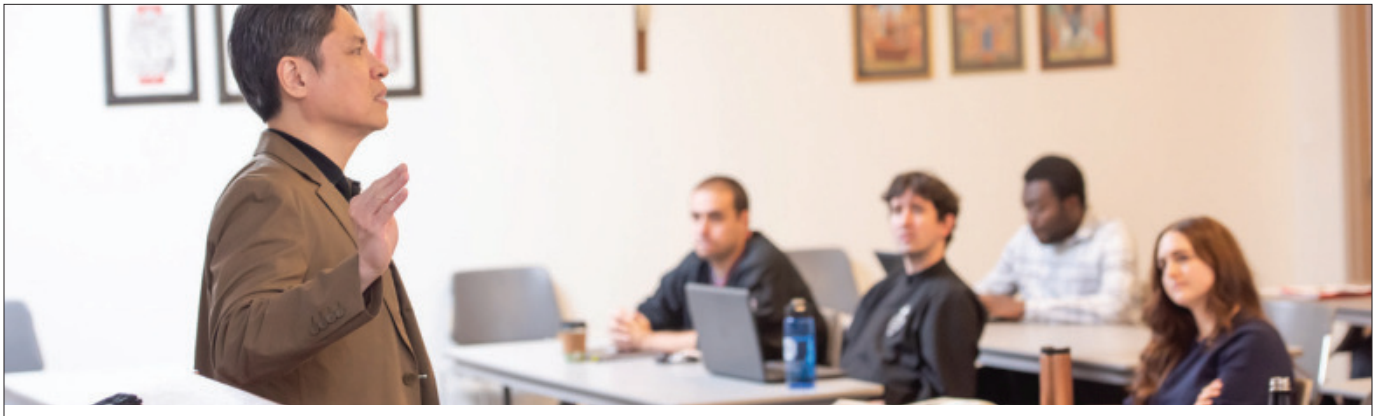
C.A.M.'s organic model allows it to be involved in an array of activities based on an evolving mixture of community needs and member capacities. "If people need something, they call," said Judy Wong, the organization's executive director.

C.A.M. has done everything from taking isolated seniors on field trips together and providing translations for Montreal's English-speaking minority to large-scale projects like retrofitting a monastery to provide temporary housing for asylum seekers. With a list of over 200 members, C.A.M. can mobilize a diverse network of contributors eager to share their talents.

"I'm not a big evangelizer in terms of standing on a street corner," said Ms. Graham, "but I believe they'll know who we are by the works that we do."

"We are caring for souls by giving them a chance to do works of practical charity," said Bishop Dowd. "My concern has to be for all of our people; I want people to get to heaven."

Dean Dettloff, *Toronto correspondent.*
Twitter: @DeanDettloff.



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U.K. politicians reconsider universal basic income as Covid-19 resurges

The discussion over the potential of a universal basic income is not new, but it has become more prominent—indeed, urgent—in the United Kingdom as the government steps up its response to the economic havoc wrought by the coronavirus pandemic.

"Momentum behind basic income has been building for years in the U.K.," said Michael Pugh, the cofounder and director of the London-based think tank Basic Income Conversation. "But the pandemic has rapidly accelerated the public's interest in the idea as gaps in the social security system have left so many people living in insecurity."

Mr. Pugh predicts that "as the health and economic impacts of the crisis continue to bite, we expect the calls for basic income to get louder and louder."

Sometimes called citizens' basic income, U.B.I. begins with a simple proposal: The state should pay each citizen a minimum income regardless of the individual's employment status, pre-existing earnings or qualifications.

The idea even got an unqualified plug from Pope Francis himself. In his recently published book *Let Us Dream*, the pope endorsed an "unconditional lump-sum payment to all citizens" in the context of his regular calls for an economically and environmentally more equitable post-Covid world.

In the United Kingdom, the pandemic's economic impact has been multifaceted. Consumer spending fell away, and businesses were forced to close; existing social support systems grew strained.

A massive social intervention from the state became unavoidable. As businesses of all types and sizes closed their doors, the U.K.'s Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme saw the state match 80 percent of furloughed workers' wages. Many believe the effectiveness of this huge cash injection by the state makes a clear case for the universal basic income.

Concerned by the possibility of persisting unemployment because of the pandemic, a growing number of Parliament members and local politicians have called on U.K. governments to at least try out the idea in pilot programs.

But even as U.B.I. proposals gain traction, many Britons—watching Covid-19 mitigation costs escalate—are becoming anxious about the national debt. Two concurrent discussions have emerged around the universal basic income—its desirability as a matter of public policy and concerns about how it would all be paid for.

U.B.I. opponents speak of the dangers of a something-for-nothing dependency culture and disincentivizing work. Others contend that state borrowing has to be repaid in the same way that individuals, households and firms need to balance their monthly books in order to remain solvent and to preserve their credit-worthy reputations.

But proponents of Modern Monetary Theory counter

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Volunteers unload donations at a local food bank in the town of Penicuik, in Midlothian, Scotland, in August 2020

that sovereign states, as currency issuers, can and do create money when they need to. Deficits can encourage growth, according to the theory, which argues that balanced state budgets are not often a public service, even if they remain desirable in running a household.

Both M.M.T. and U.B.I. could be put to the test soon in one nation of the United Kingdom. The debate about an independent Scottish currency is growing lively again, and recent polling in Scotland has shown consistent support for a second independence referendum and for a yes vote on the same. The next parliamentary elections in May might yet be effectively or even explicitly a plebiscite on independence.

By spring, the universal basic income, and the possibility of a newly independent state issuing the currency needed for it, is likely to be a major talking point in Scotland.

David Stewart, S.J., *contributes from Scotland.*
Twitter: @DavidStewartSJ.

CNS photo/Chaz Muth

Food distribution outside a Catholic Charities center in Washington, D.C., in July

Lines grow outside food pantries as Covid-19 spikes again

A line of cars queuing up for socially distanced delivery at the Croton-Cortlandt Food Pantry at Holy Name of Mary Church in Croton, N.Y., rarely let up one rainy Saturday in December. As closing time approached, the pre-packaged goods and perishables were running low. Late arrivers sensed that supplies were growing strained.

"Please," one man whispered after he was informed that each household could receive only two grocery bags. "My brother just lost his job, too. Can you give me as much as you can?"

From small-town traffic jams like this one to unprecedented scenes of cars backed up for miles outside food distribution sites in big cities like Houston and Pittsburgh, a hunger crisis foretold in the beginning days of the Covid-19 crisis is being realized. Just under 30 million U.S. adults reported that their households did not have a dependable supply of food, according to a weekly survey in January conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau.

"Food insecurity was serious before the pandemic but has really worsened, largely [because of] job loss," Jane Stenson, vice president for food and nutrition and poverty reduction strategies at Catholic Charities USA, told **America** by email. "Most of our agencies have reported anywhere from 50 to 300 percent increases in requests for food support."

Donna Markham, O.P., president and C.E.O. of Catholic Charities USA, expressed her concern about the long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in a statement released on Dec. 21: "As we have been saying since March, the ability for nonprofits such as Catholic Charities to provide the most basic of needs to the staggering number of individuals and families is not sustainable without federal assistance."

Kevin Clarke, *chief correspondent.*
Twitter: @ClarkeAtAmerica.

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Women Jesuits?

The history and the possibilities

By Barton T. Geger

Friends and colleagues of the Society of Jesus often ask whether Jesuits will permit women to join their ranks. They might be surprised to learn that the question was a hot topic in the early Society, when St. Ignatius Loyola was its superior general. Ignatius was opposed to women Jesuits for reasons that were cultural, practical and canonical, but other Jesuits were not. As a result of the conflict, one of Ignatius' best friends even sued the Society.

Arguably, some of Ignatius' reasons no longer apply, although one factor still poses a substantial obstacle. To address the question, some concepts require clarification.

First, to be a Jesuit and to be a priest are separate realities. A man becomes a Jesuit when he makes vows of poverty, chastity and obedience in the Society; a Jesuit becomes a priest when a bishop lays hands on him in the sacrament of holy orders. Not all Jesuits are priests. Those who choose not to be ordained are called Jesuit brothers. For the purposes of this article, I presuppose that the Catholic Church's understanding that it cannot ordain women, based on divine constitution, will remain unchanged. So the question at hand is whether the Society can admit women as Jesuit sisters.

Second, the expression "Jesuits who are women" can mean different things. For instance, numerous congregations modelled themselves on the Society by making apostolic work the primary emphasis of their charism, the Spiritual Exercises central to their spirituality and the Jesuit *Constitutions* the basis for their own constitutions. A prominent example is the Venerable Mary Ward (1585–1645), who founded two groups: the Congregation of Jesus and the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the latter also known as the Sisters of Loreto. People even called these women Jesuitesses. In spirit, then, female Jesuits have existed for the last four centuries.

Juana of Austria, one of few female members in the history of the Society of Jesus, and the only woman to die a Jesuit. Portrait by Alonso Sánchez Coello, circa 1557.

Wikimedia Commons

> The first Jesuits conceived the Society to be highly trained and mobile, ready at a moment's notice to go wherever the needs of the church were greatest.

In the 16th century, many Catholics believed that they were obliged to obey their spiritual directors under pain of sin, and some even made a vow to that effect. Consequently, some women reasoned, "If I am vowed to obey my Jesuit director, and he is vowed to obey his superior, then am I not a Jesuit?" Still other women made private vows to obey Ignatius, and then sent him letters indicating that they were ready to be missioned. They signed their names with "S.J."

Since the Middle Ages, some institutes like the Dominicans and Franciscans have had separate branches for men (the so-called first orders) and for women (second orders). They do not live in the same residences. Women have female superiors to whom they vow obedience, who in turn might answer to the major superiors of the first orders, or to bishops or other clerics. For reasons explained later in this article, medieval culture expected second orders to adopt a monastic lifestyle, even if their male counterparts were apostolically oriented. One example was the Poor Clares. Because the nuns could not leave their convents to attend local parishes, church law often obliged their male counterparts to serve their sacramental needs on a regular basis.

Some institutes have a third order of laypeople. Arrangements vary greatly, but generally the institutes agree to make the spiritual care of their third orders a formal part of their ministries, while the laypeople dedicate themselves to prayer and charitable works. A good example is St. Catherine of Siena, a laywoman traditionally depicted in a Dominican habit. Members of a third order might live together in their own communities; but perhaps more often, individuals continue to live at home and fulfill their other duties related to family life and secular employment.

The Society of Jesus has never had a second or third order, although a lay organization called the Sodality of Our Lady functioned effectively as the equivalent of a third order for centuries. After the Second Vatican Council, at the initiative of the Jesuits' 31st General Congregation in 1965, Jesuits around the world began to experiment with closer ties to lay partners without calling them third orders. In 1992, the Wisconsin Province in the United States started a program called Ignatian Associates. Single and married persons made private promises of simplicity, apostolic availability and fidelity to the Society's mission. Jesuit provincial superiors missioned individuals, and even couples with children, to Jesuit works in cities other than their own.

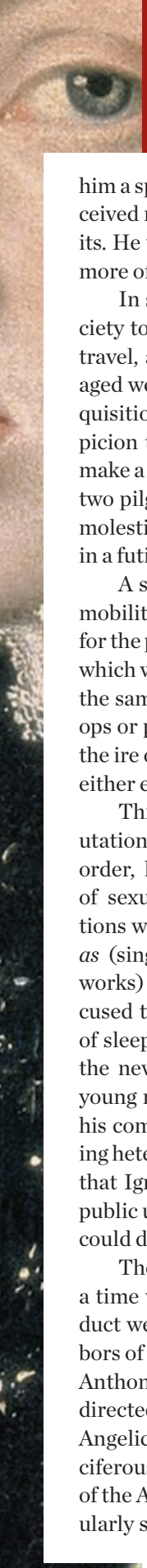
Unfortunately, tensions grew between lay partners and the Society's wider circle of colleagues. The latter resented what they saw as elitism on the part of the former and the preferential treatment given to the former with regard to placements and promotions. With some edifying exceptions, lay partners frequently were unable or unwilling to relocate. Consequently, in 2008, General Congregation 35 ended the Society's involvement in these experiments, but the Ignatian Associates continue to exist and to accept new members. Some members still serve in Jesuit works.

Finally, the term women Jesuits can denote women who make vows before an authorized member of the Society to obey its superior general, and thus they are affiliated with the Society in a stricter sense. In Ignatius" lifetime, there were four women who made such vows. To appreciate the significance of their stories, here are four reasons why Ignatius resisted their admission.

Ignatius' Rationale

The first Jesuits conceived the Society to be highly trained and mobile, ready at a moment's notice to go wherever the needs of the church were greatest. At a time when the great majority of Europeans lived and died within 20 miles of where they were born, this was a significant innovation. Not even the mendicant orders had placed such a priority on mobility for all their men as a matter of principle.

Nevertheless, stable police forces did not exist, dark roads crawled with bandits, inns were unsafe. and travelers often walked or rode through the midst of clashing armies. On one occasion, a thug ambushed Ignatius on the road and beat him to within an inch of his life. Another time, he was interrogated and strip-searched by soldiers who thought



him a spy. Years later, as superior general, Ignatius even received ransom notes from pirates who had abducted Jesuits. He was obliged to refuse, lest his payments encourage more of the same.

In short, Ignatius deemed it impracticable for the Society to expose women to the dangers of regular apostolic travel, all the more because the culture strongly discouraged women from travelling without male escorts. The inquisition once imprisoned Ignatius for five weeks on suspicion that he had encouraged a mother and daughter to make a pilgrimage alone. And he once came to the rescue of two pilgrims, a mother and daughter, whom soldiers were molesting. The mother had dressed her daughter as a boy in a futile attempt to avoid attention.

A second difficulty was Ignatius" concern to preserve mobility for his priests. He did not want them responsible for the pastoral care of cloistered nuns, Jesuit or otherwise, which would require the priests to remain in one place. For the same reason, Ignatius did not want Jesuits to be bishops or parish pastors, two decisions for which he incurred the ire of many clerics and nobles who believed that he was either elitist or inattentive to the greater good.

Third, Ignatius was highly sensitive to the public reputation of the Society. By refusing to work with a second order, he was minimizing opportunities for accusations of sexual misconduct. Rumors about his close associations with female devotees, benefactors, mystics and *beatas* (single women renowned for holiness and charitable works) had greatly hampered his own ministry. People accused two early Jesuits, Francis Xavier and Jean Codure, of sleeping with their directees. Indeed, papal approval of the new Society was nearly thwarted altogether when a young man named Miguel Landívar accused Ignatius and his companions of heresy and "immoral behavior," meaning heterosexual and homosexual unchastity. He was angry that Ignatius had refused to let him join their group. The public uproar in Rome lasted eight months before Ignatius could disprove Landívar's claims in court.

The religious climate compounded the problem. At a time when fears of heresy were rife, charges of misconduct were an easy and effective means to undercut the labors of mystics and innovators. Rumors swirled around St. Anthony Zaccaria and Countess Luisa Torelli, his spiritual directee, while they were founding the Barnabites and the Angelicas. The Dominican theologian Melchior Cano, a vociferous critic of the Society—he called Jesuits "emissaries of the Antichrist"—asserted that Jesuits and Angelicas regularly slept in the same beds in order to test whether their mutual passions were mortified.

A fourth difficulty was (and still is) that the Society is a particular type of religious order called clerks regular. Other orders of this kind, which first originated in the early 16th century, include Theatines, Barnabites and Somascans. At least in theory, ordained priesthood is essential to the charisms of clerks regular, for which reason people often called them reformed priests. In contrast, monasticism had begun as a lay movement in the ancient church; and among the mendicant founders, St. Francis of Assisi was not a priest.

Yet compared even with other clerks regular, priesthood is vital to the Jesuit charism. As Ignatius explained in the *Constitutions*, the purpose of the Society is to labor in works that serve the greater glory of God, which he also called the more universal good. That is, when presented with two or more good options in the service of God, Jesuits should endeavor to discern and choose those options that promise a wider or more enduring impact. Ignatius reasoned that, all else being equal, devout, educated priests are useful in more capacities and contexts, and can engage people more profoundly through sacramental ministry—they are more universal, so to speak—than devout persons who are either uneducated or not ordained. In this sense, priesthood is both symbolic of, and the most conducive means to, the proper end of the Society.

Then why does the Society have Jesuit brothers? In 1546, Ignatius asked Pope Paul III for permission to accept both skilled laymen (brothers) and devout but uneducated priests (spiritual coadjutors) into the Society as live-in, temporary workers who could ease the practical and pastoral demands being placed on the fledgling Society. Ignatius intended to dismiss them when he no longer needed their services. In that light, it makes sense that he did not consider them full members of the Society, nor did their presence contradict the Society's stated option for educated priests. In actual practice, however, and from the beginning, these men spent their entire lives in the Society. It seems that superiors rarely if ever dismissed good brothers and priests, presumably because their services were always needed and because they had formed fraternal bonds with their companions. As a result, as early as Ignatius" own term as superior general, a brother in the Roman College named Juan of Alba was lamenting that brothers were second-class members of the Society.

To be candid, tensions continue regarding the place of brothers and spiritual coadjutors in the Society. It has been a source of pain for many that brothers cannot be major su-

Juana of Austria has the distinction of being the only woman to die a Jesuit.

periors (provincial or regional superiors who mission Jesuits), or superiors of local communities. Similarly, spiritual coadjutors cannot vote in provincial congregations, nor be elected provincial superiors or voting members of general congregations. Neither grade makes the special fourth vow of obedience to the pope in matters of mission, which Ignatius considered a hallmark of the Jesuit charism. Since the Second Vatican Council, many Jesuits have desired to change the law and practice of the Society in these matters. Other Jesuits, as well as some recent popes and other clerics in the Roman curia, have opposed allowing brothers to make the fourth vow on the grounds that it would be incompatible with the Society's priestly character as specified in the *Formula of the Institute*, the charter approved by Paul III in 1539. The *Formula* is pontifical law, which means that the Society cannot amend it without papal approval.

The Women

After his conversion, Ignatius depended heavily on wealthy women to finance his education and travel. In Barcelona especially, his devotees formed an Ignatian circle of sorts dedicated to prayer and charitable works. Shortly after the founding of the Society, Ignatius sent two Jesuits to Barcelona, who themselves established friendships with these women.

The center of the circle was Isabel Roser, wife of a cloth merchant, whom Ignatius had met about a year after his conversion experience. The Rosers took Ignatius into their home. They paid for his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and then for his Latin and philosophy classes in Barcelona. Isabel remained in contact with Ignatius during his subsequent journeys. She sent him funds as needed and recruited other noblewomen for the Barcelona circle. Ignatius later referred to her as "the good and kindly mother that you have so long been to me."

Isabel's husband died in 1541, one year after the founding of the Society. She determined to go to Rome and found a congregation of women under obedience to Ignatius. He tried to dissuade her in several letters, but her two Jesuit friends supported the plan, suggesting that he would change his mind if she made her case face-to-face. But when Isabel arrived on Ignatius" doorstep, he held his ground.

Isabel then wrote a letter to Paul III in which she asked him to order Ignatius to receive her vows and those of her maidservant, Francisca Cruyllas. As an omen of the difficulties to come, she also asked the pope to override Ignatius" order that her two Jesuit friends leave Barcelona. The pope acceded to the first request, and on Dec. 25, 1544, the two women plus a third, Lucrezia di Brandine, professed simple vows before Ignatius. Isabel donated the remainder of her estate to the Society, and the women moved to the House of St. Martha, a residence for women established by Ignatius.

Many laywomen and nuns in Spain and Italy watched these developments with excitement. Yet if any real hope existed that Ignatius might change his mind, Isabel did their cause few favors. According to Jesuits in Rome at this time—granted that they might have embellished if they resented her—she required almost daily conversations with Ignatius. During his frequent bouts with illness, she insisted on caring for him while forbidding Jesuits to enter his bedroom. She continued to go over his head to clerics in the papal Curia, she required the best Jesuit spiritual directors in Rome, and she spent the Society's money without consulting Ignatius. A disgruntled Jesuit brother was assigned to be Isabel's servant, tending to her horse and cleaning her quarters—although in fairness to Isabel, wealthy women who joined convents often were allowed to have their own servants.

In May 1546, at Ignatius' request, the pope rescinded his permission. At the time, Isabel's two nephews were in Rome, angry that she had given their inheritance to the Society. (She was childless.) They convinced her to sue, saying that Ignatius was a hypocrite and a thief who had never been serious about keeping her. But Ignatius had kept careful records of her gifts and expenditures. He produced these in court, demonstrating that if anything, Isabel owed the Society money.

In the end, Isabel Roser and Francisca Cruyllas joined convents in Barcelona, and Lucrezia di Brandine one in Naples. Isabel wrote a touching letter to Ignatius in December 1547, asking forgiveness for the difficulties she had caused him. She died in 1554, two years before Ignatius.

Juana of Austria has the distinction of being the only woman to die a Jesuit. She was sister to King Philip II of Spain and became acting ruler when Philip moved to England to marry Mary Tudor. Juana was only 19 years old. Present in the Spanish court were her spiritual director, Francis Borgia, S.J., and a court preacher, Antonio Araoz, S.J. Shortly after assuming her regency, she informed the two Jesuits of her desire to join the Society.

Fathers Borgia and Araoz were enthusiastic; in fact, Araoz was one of the two Jesuits who had encouraged Isabel a decade earlier. Ignatius was in a tight corner. He needed the princess' support if the Society was to survive in Spain. To refuse her altogether was not an option. But the conflicts of interest and the inevitable political and ecclesial jealousies made the whole situation rather absurd. Given her political responsibilities, for example, it was impossible for her to live the vows of poverty or obedience in any practical way, and she would have to be dispensed from any vow of chastity as soon as a political marriage was thrust upon her.

In October 1554, Ignatius met with Jesuits in Rome to discuss their options regarding a certain Mateo Sánchez. The name was an alias for Juana, in case anyone intercepted their letters. Ignatius decided to allow her to make simple perpetual vows, the same kind made by Jesuit scholastics. This meant that, as far as Juana was concerned, she was obliged before God to keep her vows for life; but her vows did not bind Ignatius, and he could release her from them at any time.

Afterward, Juana set herself to creating a culture of modesty and religious devotion in the Spanish court, so that unsuspecting observers began to describe the palace as a convent. She donated to the Jesuit colleges in Rome and Valladolid, she oversaw projects for the poor and for the reform of convents, and she defended the Society from its critics, including the aforementioned Melchior Cano. She even protected Borgia from becoming a cardinal, an office that Ignatius wished Jesuits to avoid as much as possible.

There were difficulties. Juana and Borgia associated so closely that her own brother suspected an affair between them. Like Isabel, she became displeased when Ignatius attempted to assign her favorite Jesuits elsewhere. She ordered Borgia and Araoz to remain at the court, and then she wrote to Ignatius, essentially informing him that he could not have them for other missions. She also "asked" him to make her their local religious superior, so that their duty to obey her under holy obedience could augment the political obedience that they already owed her.

Juana lost her regency at age 24, when Philip returned to Spain. She continued to live ascetically and founded several women's communities. Philip, unaware that his sister was a Jesuit, tried to arrange a marriage. Among the potential husbands were the French king, archdukes and even Juana's own nephew. Nothing came of it. Juana remained in contact with Borgia after he became the third superior general of the Society, and she died on Sept. 7, 1573, at the age of 38.

What Now?

What are the chances of women Jesuits today? For the sake of charity to those with fervent desires to join the Society, I will state the following points bluntly. I ask readers not to interpret this as an insensitivity to the deep feelings surrounding this matter.

If one understands the term "women Jesuits" to mean women with vows of obedience to the Society's superior general, then it simply is not going to happen anytime in the foreseeable future. It contradicts the priestly charism of the Society that Ignatius and his first companions had intended, a charism that was approved and cemented by a papal charter. Consequently, nothing short of an extraordinary intervention by a pope will make it possible, let alone feasible.

Considered hypothetically, as a matter for discernment, the determining factor would have to be whether admission of women will better enable the Society to serve the more universal good of souls, as opposed to admitting women for the sake of satisfying their own holy desires. (Ignatius was quite consistent on that point when it came to admission of individual men.) And it is not obvious that this would be the case, in light of the fruitful relationships that the Society already enjoys with its lay colleagues, and in light of the human tensions, logistical hurdles and additional expenses that would arise.

For example, women Jesuits could not be local or provincial superiors, they could not be elected voting members of general congregations and they could not take the fourth vow, all of which would multiply exponentially the unrest that already exists in the Society on these matters. Male and female Jesuits could not live together, but separate houses for women would create a subculture in the

Vintage engraving of St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), the Spanish Basque priest and theologian who founded the Society of Jesus and was its first superior general

iStock

The Society of Jesus largely owes its existence to the generosity and friendship of women.

Society that Ignatius strenuously sought to avoid. The Society's recent experiments with lay partners illustrate other aforementioned difficulties that would arise.

Presumably for these reasons, the question of women Jesuits is not on the radar of the universal Society. That is to say, it has not been a subject of serious conversation at any of the six general congregations that have been held since Vatican II.

If one understands "women Jesuits" to mean congregations who model themselves on the Society's way of proceeding but who answer to their own superiors, then the good news is that numerous such groups already exist, with works all over the globe. In fact, Ignatius expressed support for congregations of this sort. In 1546, he wrote a memorandum to Jesuits in Gandía and Valencia in which he rejected the admission of women into the Society, citing the aforementioned reasons. But then he added, "[I]n order to win more souls, and to serve God our Lord more universally in all things with greater spiritual fruit, we are persuaded that it would be a good and holy work [for you] to create a society of noble ladies [*compañía de señoras*], and of other women who seem suitable in Our Lord, either according to the guidelines that I am sending along with this memorandum, or however it seems best to you there."

The Universal Good of Souls

To that idea, people today often reply with a good-natured sigh: "Oh, it's not the same thing." No, admittedly, it is not. But in the interests of a sound discernment, a person must name the difference, and then ask whether it justifies not joining a women's congregation. Perhaps a person is thinking of her love for the Society, or for individual Jesuits whom she has known. Perhaps she wishes to play her own role in the Society's storied history. But if a person's sole purpose is to serve the more universal good of souls, taking into consideration her gifts, limitations and circumstances—Ignatius called this a pure intention—then the other motivations are not really the proper criteria for a vocational discernment.

Let me put that another way. On three occasions, married women with children have said to me that they would have become Jesuits, but because they could not, they got married. I believe that they were sincere. But I also wonder how they would respond, were their daughters to say to them: "I wanted to marry So-and-So, whom I love and who is just perfect for me, but since he said 'no,' I will give up on marriage altogether and become a nun."

The Society of Jesus largely owes its existence to the generosity and friendship of women. Ignatius was hardly unaware of that when he released his old friend Isabel from her vows. It is also true that many of the Society's works today would not be viable without their lay colleagues and benefactors. Modern Jesuits are highly conscious of that as well. If it is possible for debts to exist between fellow servants when those debts are incurred in the service of the same master (Lk 17: 7-10), then this is a debt that the Society will never be able to repay.

General Congregation 35 observed that Ignatius recognized the benefits of collaboration with laypeople from the beginning. In the service of the more universal good, early Jesuits established numerous organizations that operated in conjunction with the Society but without juridical bonds to it. Today, lay-Jesuit cooperation in mission continues in an even richer variety of ways. G.C. 35 called this collaboration the particular way that the Society responds to the needs of the world, because it "expresses our true identity as members of the Church, the complementarity of our diverse calls to holiness, our mutual responsibility for the mission of Christ, our desire to join people of good will in the service of the human family, and the coming of the Kingdom of God."

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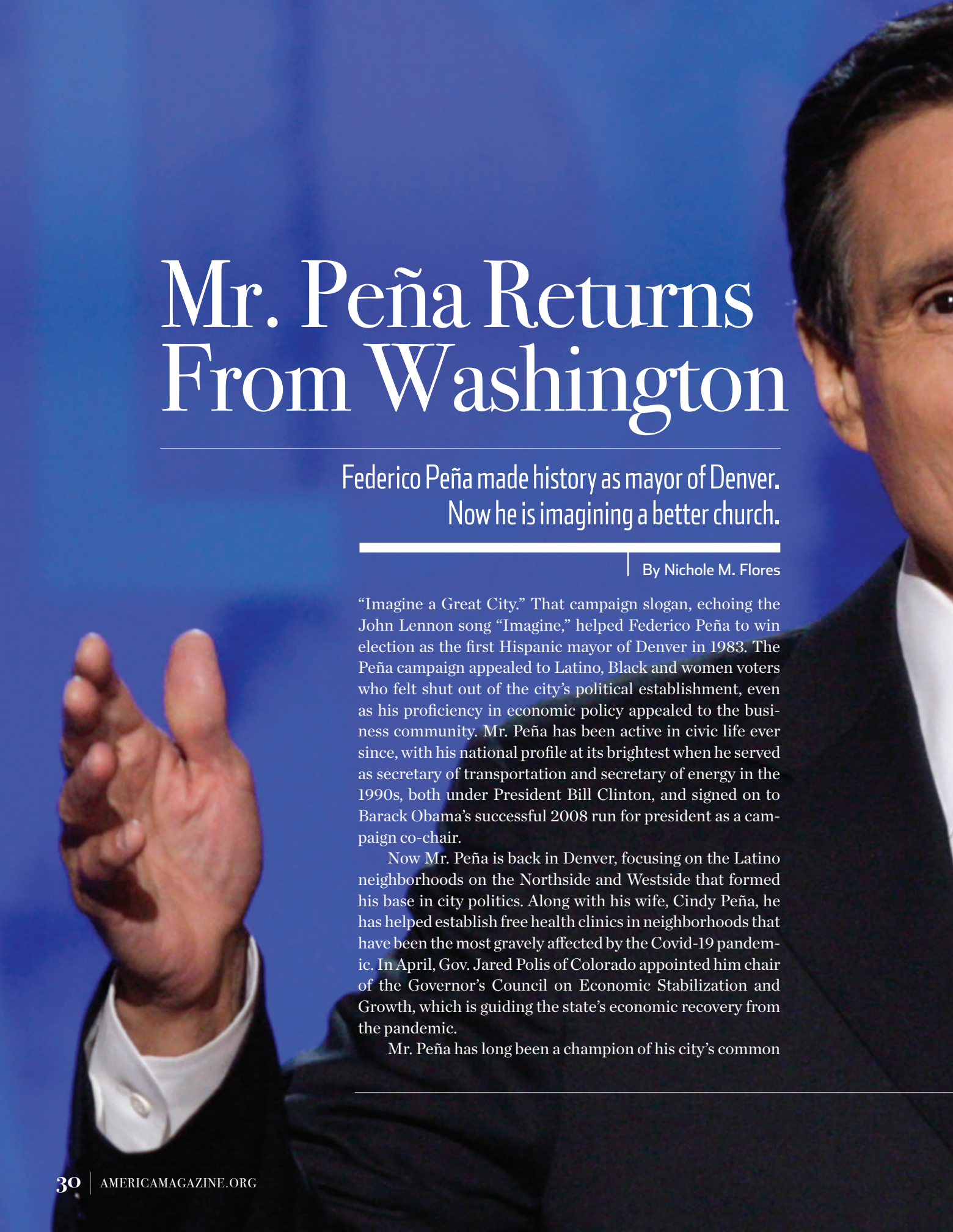


Mr. Peña Returns From Washington

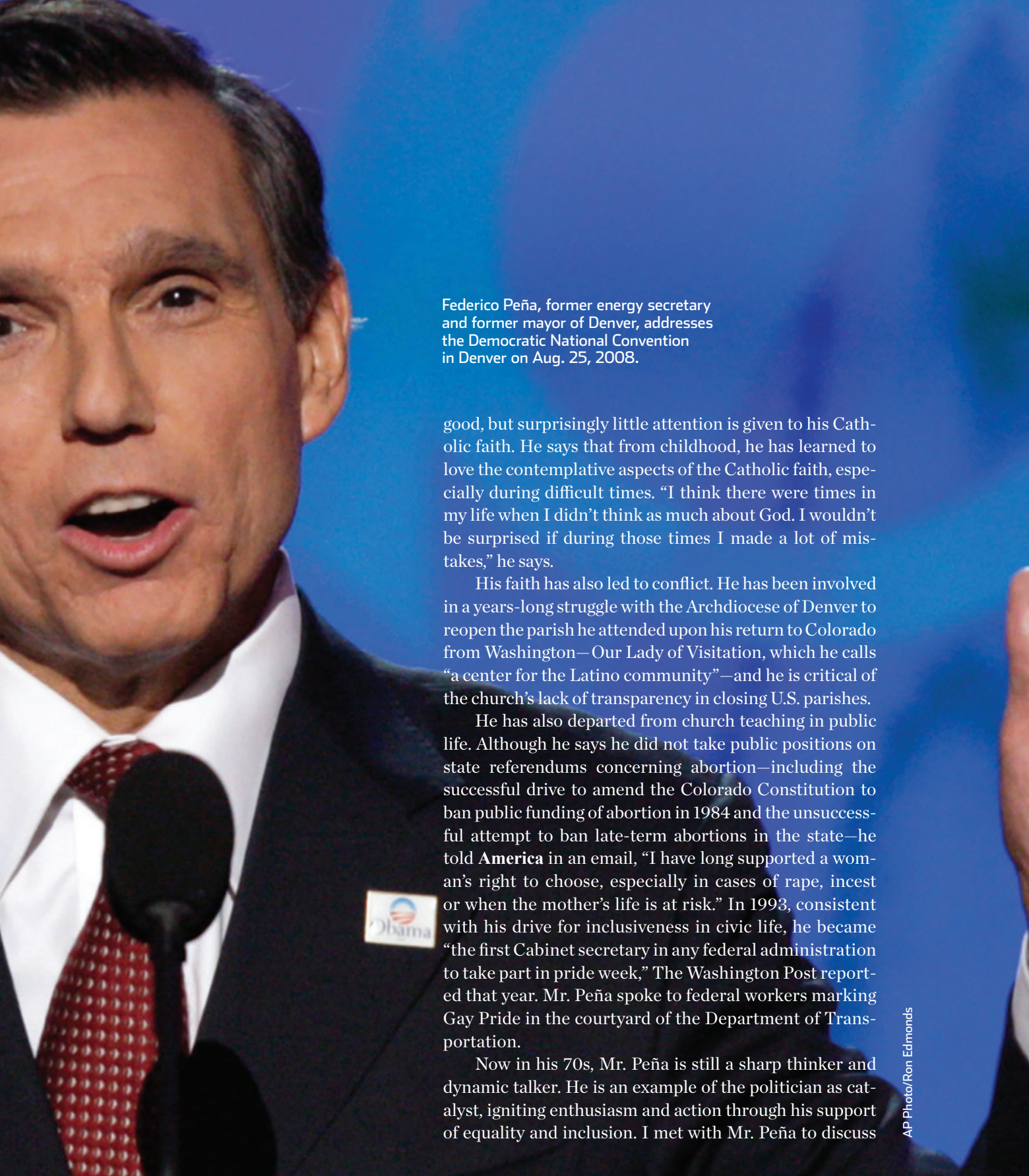
Federico Peña made history as mayor of Denver. Now he is imagining a better church.

By Nichole M. Flores

"Imagine a Great City." That campaign slogan, echoing the John Lennon song "Imagine," helped Federico Peña to win election as the first Hispanic mayor of Denver in 1983. The Peña campaign appealed to Latino, Black and women voters who felt shut out of the city's political establishment, even as his proficiency in economic policy appealed to the business community. Mr. Peña has been active in civic life ever since, with his national profile at its brightest when he served as secretary of transportation and secretary of energy in the 1990s, both under President Bill Clinton, and signed on to Barack Obama's successful 2008 run for president as a campaign co-chair.

Now Mr. Peña is back in Denver, focusing on the Latino neighborhoods on the Northside and Westside that formed his base in city politics. Along with his wife, Cindy Peña, he has helped establish free health clinics in neighborhoods that have been the most gravely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. In April, Gov. Jared Polis of Colorado appointed him chair of the Governor's Council on Economic Stabilization and Growth, which is guiding the state's economic recovery from the pandemic.

Mr. Peña has long been a champion of his city's common



Federico Peña, former energy secretary and former mayor of Denver, addresses the Democratic National Convention in Denver on Aug. 25, 2008.

AP Photo/Ron Edmonds

good, but surprisingly little attention is given to his Catholic faith. He says that from childhood, he has learned to love the contemplative aspects of the Catholic faith, especially during difficult times. "I think there were times in my life when I didn't think as much about God. I wouldn't be surprised if during those times I made a lot of mistakes," he says.

His faith has also led to conflict. He has been involved in a years-long struggle with the Archdiocese of Denver to reopen the parish he attended upon his return to Colorado from Washington—Our Lady of Visitation, which he calls "a center for the Latino community"—and he is critical of the church's lack of transparency in closing U.S. parishes.

He has also departed from church teaching in public life. Although he says he did not take public positions on state referendums concerning abortion—including the successful drive to amend the Colorado Constitution to ban public funding of abortion in 1984 and the unsuccessful attempt to ban late-term abortions in the state—he told **America** in an email, "I have long supported a woman's right to choose, especially in cases of rape, incest or when the mother's life is at risk." In 1993, consistent with his drive for inclusiveness in civic life, he became "the first Cabinet secretary in any federal administration to take part in pride week," The Washington Post reported that year. Mr. Peña spoke to federal workers marking Gay Pride in the courtyard of the Department of Transportation.

Now in his 70s, Mr. Peña is still a sharp thinker and dynamic talker. He is an example of the politician as catalyst, igniting enthusiasm and action through his support of equality and inclusion. I met with Mr. Peña to discuss

his long career and his new campaign, taken all the way to the Vatican, to save his "little pink church."

The Fight for City Hall

Covering Mr. Peña's 1983 campaign, Phil Nash of Denver's Westword magazine wrote, "Peña pumps out energy like a human dynamo. And that energy draws people—lots of people."

Serving as mayor from 1983 to 1991, Mr. Peña oversaw a flurry of economic development in Denver and the surrounding region, including the controversial construction of Denver International Airport; the 11-mile freeway leading to the airport is named in his honor. (He bashfully told me that he simply refers to it as "The Boulevard.")

I was only 18 months old when Mr. Peña was first elected, but his 1987 campaign is one of my earliest memories. There was a re-election poster in my godparents' basement in Southwest Denver showing Mr. Peña crossing the finish line of the Mayor's Cup Marathon, his arms raised triumphantly toward the sky. Printed in bold orange letters above his head was one word: "Denver!"

The energetic Latino mayor became a role model to me. He invited our city to imagine a just society where all people were able to contribute regardless of race, gender or sexual orientation.

Other trailblazing Latino mayors ran for office in cities with more sizable Hispanic majorities— Henry Cisneros in San Antonio, for example, where Hispanics made up the majority of the electorate. In Denver, that number was only 13 percent when Mr. Peña first ran, necessitating a broad-based coalition strategy. The Peña campaign garnered endorsements from labor unions, environmental groups, women's rights organizations and even L.G.B.T. voters.

To be sure, Latino voters formed the backbone of the Peña campaign. But he also worked to build support in the African-American neighborhoods of East Denver. He told me that Black churches "let me go and speak to the congregation about running for office or any other issue that I wanted to"—and from the pulpit, as opposed to the parish halls to which the Catholic churches limited him.

But Mr. Peña, then a 36-year-old civil rights lawyer and the leader of the Democratic minority in the Colorado House of Representatives, still faced unease over his Mexican-American identity. As Mr. Nash wrote: "There are still some people who say Denver isn't quite ready for Mayor Peña. And they really mean that Denver isn't ready for a mayor so young—and so Hispanic."

But speaking to Mr. Nash, the candidate downplayed the influence of Hispanic identity on his ability to govern the city: "The question I am asking is if Denver is ready for a person who has ideas, who has a track record, who is able, who has integrity, who is going to work hard, who is creative, who is thinking about the future, who is going to provide leadership for Denver in the '80s, who happens to be Hispanic."

Mr. Peña finished first, with 36 percent, in the May primary, easily winning Hispanic neighborhoods but showing strength throughout the city and doing especially well with newer Denver residents. Mayor Bill McNichols, the 73-year-old incumbent who had been in office for 14 years, finished a distant third, with the other run-off election spot going to Denver's former District Attorney Dale Tooley. Mr. Peña won the run-off with 51.4 percent of the vote.

In his victory speech Mr. Peña said: "I think we have set history in this country tonight. All the rules in politics have been broken." Time magazine reported that young people cruised the streets of downtown Denver in their cars, chanting, "Chicano Power!"

The enthusiasm in the Hispanic community for Mr. Peña, who was decidedly committed to pursuing change from within political institutions, marked a change from Denver's anti-establishment Chicano movement (to use the term preferred by many of its leaders to this day), which became nationally known in the '60s and '70s. Indeed, Mr. Peña took a different path from that of another Denver Chicano icon, Rodolfo Gonzales, known as Corky.

Mr. Gonzales, a former boxer and leader of the one-time civil rights and cultural organization Crusade for Justice, promoted an anti-establishment, anti-institutional strategy for Chicano civil rights. "I don't believe in the two-party system," Mr. Gonzales said in a 1973 interview with The Denver Post. "It's a two-headed monster that eats from the same trough." Nevertheless, Mr. Gonzales supported the Peña campaign.

'Steeped in Catholicism'

Born in Laredo, Tex., on the U.S.-Mexico border, Mr. Peña was raised in Brownsville, another border city, and attended Catholic schools there.

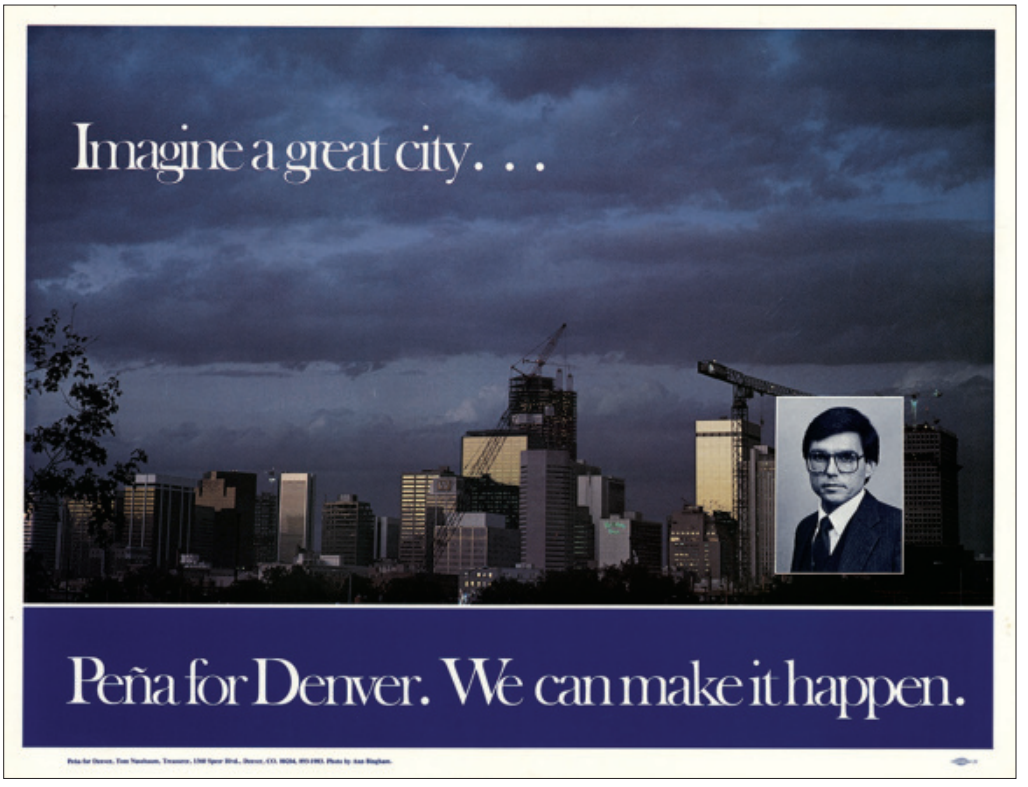
"I was raised steeped in Catholicism, both by family tradition and education," he says. He was one of five brothers, all of whom were altar servers; and his family was often called upon to help with larger liturgies. "Whenever the priest needed a team of altar boys, he would make one call.... We would do Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve."

After high school, Mr. Peña earned both undergraduate and law degrees at the University of Texas. He spent his

Right: A campaign postcard for Federico Peña

Below: A march in Denver pays tribute to the Chicano icon Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales a few days after his death on April 12, 2012. Gonzales, a former boxer and leader of the civil rights and cultural organization Crusade or Justice, promoted an anti-establishment strategy for civil rights, while Mr. Peña worked for change through the electoral system.

Lower photo: Mr. Peña addresses supporters of President Barack Obama during a campaign stop at the Colorado State Fairgrounds in Pueblo, Colo., in August 2012.



AP Photo/David Zalubowski

AP Photo/David Zalubowski

early career practicing civil rights law, working for organizations like the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund and the Chicano Education Project, both in Denver. It was not long before friends encouraged him to run for the state legislature.

"I wasn't thinking as a young lawyer, 'someday I'm going to become a politician,'" he says now, but "I am absolutely convinced that God had a plan for me."

He explains, "As a Catholic, I was taught to give, to give back, to share, to care for the underprivileged, to care for others and to not be self-centered."

While mayor, Mr. Peña attended Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in North Denver, a Latino parish once known for its tradition of social activism. After his return from Washington, he began attending Our Lady of Visitation, a bit outside of the city, where his father-in-law served as a deacon for 30 years. He speaks with fondness about each parish, but exudes a delight in his account of participating in a church bazaar at Our Lady of Visitation with his wife, Cindy: "We ran the pickle booth!"

In addition to working on education and immigration justice, Mr. Peña has also helped expand health care access in Denver. He and his wife led the efforts to establish and fund a health clinic in heavily Latino southwest Denver. The Federico F. Peña Southwest clinic (on South Federal

> **I think there were times in my life when I didn't think as much about God. I wouldn't be surprised if during those times I made a lot of mistakes.**

Boulevard, near where I grew up), operated by a state authority, opened in 2016.

Mr. Peña's faith and desire to serve the Latino community have guided his political career. But most recently, his passion for people on the margins and a service-driven Catholic faith has involved him with a battle against the Archdiocese of Denver.

Our Lady of Visitation

Our Lady of Visitation is located just north of Denver, in Adams County, in an unincorporated area known as Goat Hill ("El Alto de la Chiva"). The parish celebrated its first Mass on Christmas Eve in 1949, and the current church opened in 1954. The thriving church saw generations of baptisms, first Communions and weddings.

The Archdiocese of Denver abruptly closed it in May 2017, citing the shortage of priests and financial instability as reasons for collapsing it with a larger parish nearby. (Special Masses have been celebrated at the church about twice a year since then.) Mr. Peña says this explanation does not hold up: "We found four retired priests who were willing to do the Mass, [and] we had $250,000 in the bank."

Mr. Peña and other members of the shuttered church formed the Goat Hill Society to try to reverse the archdiocese's decision. But, at least so far, they have been unsuccessful. In response to my queries about the church, Mark Haas, director of public relations for the Archdiocese of Denver, emailed me in October: "Many efforts were made to have conversations with those who were passionate about continuing Mass at OLV, and invite them to participate in a full parish experience at either Holy Trinity Parish or another local parish.... [N]ow that the matter is fully resolved, we see no benefit in continuing to revisit the issue."

The Archdiocese of Denver is not unique here.

Continued on page 40

Mr. Peña, seen here during the Democratic National Convention in Denver in 2008, said his Catholic faith inspired his public life. AP Photo/Charlie Neibergall

America | MEDIA
A JESUIT MINISTRY

AMERICA'S GUIDE TO CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION NORTH & EAST EDITION

I have gone to Catholic school all my life, starting in a one room schoolhouse in the Philippines. Through hard work and patience, I ended up going to Regis High School in New York City, eventually leading me to Fordham University, another Jesuit institution. Needless to say, my journey through Catholic school was one of constant evolution and escalation, and it gave me a greater appreciation for the nuances of a Catholic education.

I can say with confidence that the strength of my faith life and my professional success have been directly proportional to the time I spent in Catholic school. Think back to your days in those hallowed halls, filled with school uniforms, weekday Masses, academic rigor, even just spending time with your friends outside of class. The Catholic school difference is one that builds character and develops personality. Supporting any of the schools in this brochure means giving more young men and women that same opportunity. Certainly, I never would have been able to become an O'Hare fellow here at America Media, striving and learning every day to be the best journalist I can be. That's the Catholic school difference. That's what your support can give others.

Kevin Christopher Robles, *O'Hare Fellow at America Media*

Photo Courtesy Bud Glick, June 2018

Boston College High School
Email: info@bchigh.edu; Website: www.bchigh.edu

Boston College High School is a Jesuit, Catholic college preparatory school. We challenge our students to become young men of integrity, educated in faith and for justice, committed to academic excellence and service to others. We strive to reflect the diversity of our church and community while working to form leaders of competence, conscience and compassion.

Canisius High School
Email: admissions@canisiushigh.org; Website: www.canisiushigh.org

Canisius is a Jesuit, college-preparatory school founded in 1870 for boys in grades 9 through 12. Canisius offers a challenging curriculum that provides a broad range of course offerings, plus inter-scholastic sports opportunities as well as dozens of music ensembles, teams, and clubs. At the heart of it all is a commitment to Christian Service in the Jesuit tradition.

Cheverus High School
Email: info@cheverus.org; Website: www.cheverus.org

Cheverus High School is the only co-educational, Jesuit college preparatory school in New England. Students are challenged academically and encouraged to honor their own unique passions and gifts. Located in Portland, Maine, Cheverus is committed to cultivating excellence and forming young people into competent, intellectually curious, and socially conscious adults. At Cheverus, we prepare young men and women to be people for and with others.

Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit High School
Email: admissions@cristoreyatlanta.org; Website: www.cristoreyatlanta.org

Cristo Rey Atlanta Jesuit High School is a Catholic learning community that educates young people of limited economic means, of any faith or creed, to become men and women for and with others. Through a rigorous college preparatory curriculum, integrated with a relevant work study experience, students graduate prepared for college and life.

Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, Baltimore
Email: development@cristoreybalt.org; Website: www.cristoreybalt.org

Our mission is to empower Baltimore youth to succeed in college, career, and life. We provide access and opportunity for students of religious, racial, and ethnic diversity to excel through rigorous academics, a corporate internship program, extracurricular activities, and faith formation. We transform lives in the Catholic, Jesuit tradition of faith, justice and reconciliation.

Cristo Rey New York High School
Website: www.cristoreyny.org

Cristo Rey New York High School (CRNYHS) puts faith into action. We provide students from low-income backgrounds with a high-quality college preparatory education and real-life work experience that prepares them for success. CRNY-HS collaborates with corporate partners and philanthropic donors to make the program extraordinarily effective and affordable for all families.

Fairfield College Preparatory School
Email: admissions@fairfieldprep.org; Website: www.fairfieldprep.org/america

Fairfield College Preparatory School is the Jesuit, Catholic school of Connecticut, forming young men of intellectual competence who possess the conscience to make wise decisions, a compassion for others, and a commitment to global justice. In a community of faith, our students develop their relationship with God and one another.

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A JESUIT MINISTRY

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Difficult decisions about parish closures face nearly every U.S. diocese, and financial pressures will only mount as the economic fallout from the Covid-19 pandemic drains parish and diocesan resources around the world. It should also be noted that the archdiocese has made extensive outreach to Latino Catholics, emphasizing its numerous Spanish-language Masses and a plethora of ministries geared toward Latino Catholics, including the work of its Centro de Juan Diego, which offers educational, legal and tax resources for Denver's Latino community. These efforts were highlighted at the V National Encuentro of Hispanic/Latino Ministry in 2018.

Reflecting upon his experience, Mr. Peña argues for greater transparency in decision-making about church closures and consolidations. To illustrate his point, he cites one of the challenging decisions he made during his tenure as mayor. The plans for Denver's new airport, he explains, required the controversial purchase of land and homes (for "fair market value," Mr. Peña says) on the proposed site. Mr. Peña says he decided it was necessary to meet face-to-face with the affected residents: "I didn't send my manager of public works or my city attorney. I went out there personally and met with those three or four hundred families."

In the case of Our Lady of Visitation, Mr. Peña says he is merely asking that church leaders model the virtues of mercy and pastoralism that Pope Francis has emphasized throughout his pontificate. Referring to a lack of dialogue and transparency in closing parishes, he says: "That's not the way you deal with Americans or American Catholics. If you're going to make a decision, have the courage to go out and meet with the people and say, 'This is the reason I'm going to close the church.'"

The topic of accountability illustrates how Mr. Peña's faith informs his civic values and vice versa. "This is a nation of democracy, of freedom of speech, of freedom of protest," he tells me. "This is the kind of culture where people ask questions and they want answers."

Echoing John Courtney Murray, S.J., the author of *We Hold These Truths: Catholic Reflections on the American Proposition,* he urges the U.S. church to be more responsive to its democratic culture even as it remains distinct from it.

Being Latino and Catholic in Public Life

How does the example Federico Peña gives as a Latino practicing faith in public life suggest a way forward for other Latino Catholic candidates? The question is more prominent than ever. Nearly 40 years have passed since Mr. Peña's election as mayor, and today Latinos have a greater presence in elected public life at both the local and national levels. Two heirs to Mr. Peña's legacy are Julián Castro and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

Last year, Mr. Castro, who served as mayor of San Antonio and as secretary of housing and urban development in the Obama administration, was among the contenders for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. His strong presidential debate performances helped to reshape the national discussion of immigration reform; before that, as secretary of the same department, he highlighted the challenges of gentrification in neighborhoods of color and the threats to social institutions that gentrification has exacerbated, including Catholic parishes. Like Mr. Peña, Mr. Castro shows an ability to imagine a brighter future for a nation that includes the contributions of people who are often left out of civic life.

A prominent example of a Latina Catholic on the national stage is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who won election to the U.S. Congress from New York's 14th Congressional District in 2018. Like Mr. Peña, she attracted national attention by defeating a longtime incumbent—in this case Joe Crowley, a member of the House leadership, in the Democratic primary. Ms. Ocasio-Cortez has become one of the most outspoken members of Congress in her first term. In her work toward reforming the U.S. criminal justice system, particularly around issues of incarceration, she has been explicit in linking her advocacy to her faith.

"By nature, a society that forgives and rehabilitates its people is a society that forgives and transforms itself. That takes a radical kind of love, a secret of which is given in the Lord's Prayer: Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us," she told **America** in an interview in 2018. "And let us not forget the guiding principle of 'the least among us' found in Matthew: that we are compelled to care for the hungry, thirsty, homeless, naked, sick and, yes—the imprisoned."

When he was running for mayor, Mr. Peña asked Denverites to imagine a great city. That language has its own resonances in our Catholic tradition, both in Scripture and in our shared notions of an eschatalogical realization of the kingdom of God. Inspired by that tradition as well as Mr. Peña's invitation, we might ask what it will take for us to imagine a renewed church, one that values accountability, transparency and mercy. His fight to save his small parish—animated by the democratic ethos that he helped shape in his community and that enriches the church in the United States and beyond—shows a path forward, even as it unveils the enduring challenges posed by such lofty tasks.

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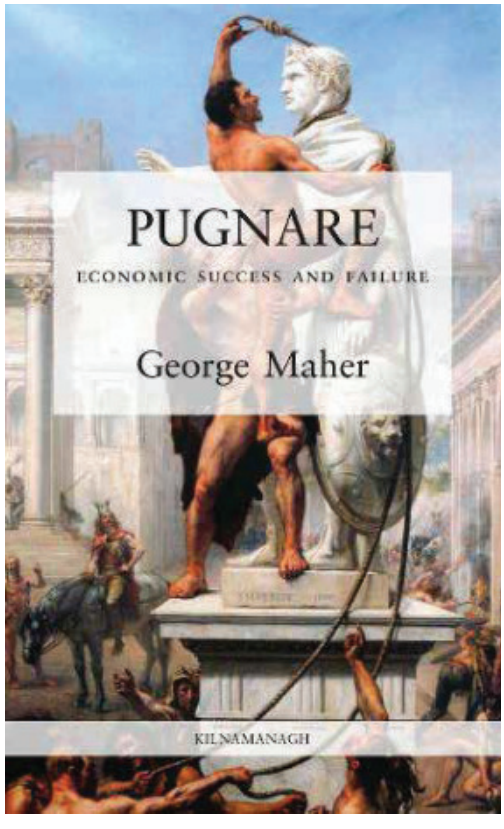
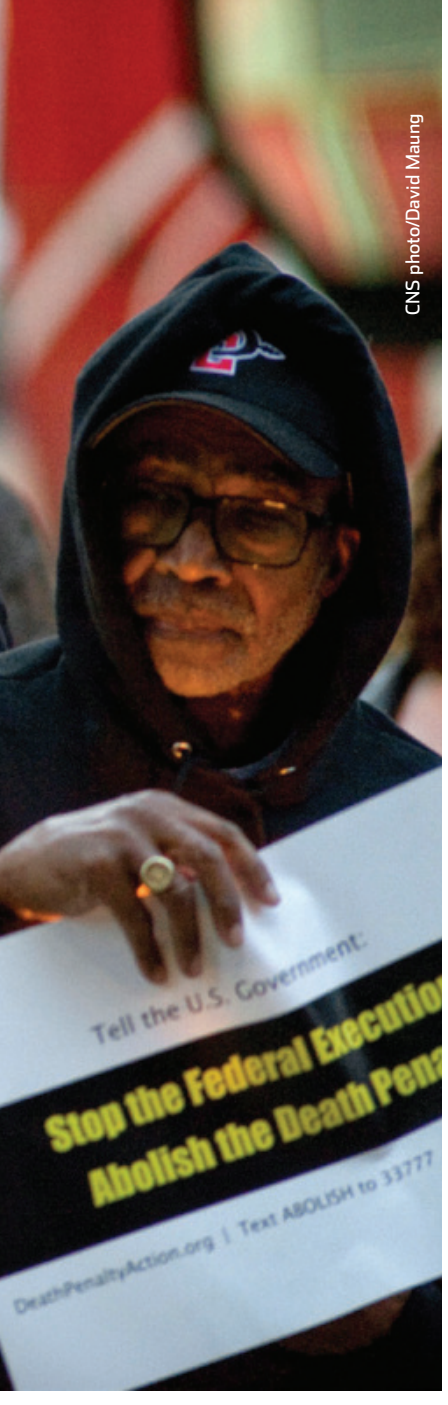


CATHOLIC JUDGES AND THE DEATH PENALTY

By Nathaniel V. Romano

When morality and judicial prudence collide



CNS photo/David Maung

Auxiliary Bishop John P. Dolan of San Diego participates in a candlelight prayer vigil on Dec. 8, 2019, held to oppose the Trump administration's plan to reinstate the federal death penalty.

On the evening of Nov. 19, the United States government executed Orlando Cordia Hall. This was the eighth execution by the federal government this year, after a 17-year hiatus on executions at the federal level. Mr. Hall's execution came only after the Supreme Court, over the dissent of three justices (Stephen Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan), dissolved an injunction issued by a federal trial court preventing the execution from going forward.

Almost immediately, online arguments erupted. Particular ire was aimed at the Catholic justices on the Supreme Court, especially the recently confirmed Amy Coney Barrett. Given the church's clear teaching against the death penalty, some have suggested that Justice Barrett has acted contrary to church teaching; others, however, suggest there is room for disagreement, or that church teaching is inapposite for judges. Whatever the merits of the Hall case—and of the cases involving the executions scheduled before the end of the Trump administration—this action by the Supreme Court offers us a chance to explore the question of how we might expect a Catholic judge in a democratic and pluralist system to bring their faith into their public and governmental work.

Put starkly: The moral law prohibits what the civil law allows. In his 2018 amendment to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and in his recent encyclical "Fratelli Tutti," Pope Francis confirmed and strengthened decades of Catholic teaching on this topic. It is similarly clear that contemporary understandings hold the death penalty to be constitutional in the United States, at least when carried out in conformity with the law and other constitutional requirements. Given that Catholic moral theology does not include a "But Not in the United States" provision, there is a clear tension for Catholic judges.

The simplest resolutions to this tension are superficially attractive but raise their own problems. One could simply declare that the only response for any Catholic involved at any stage is to disrupt and shut down the system, to do all in their power to stop executions. Similarly, one could simply say that Catholic teaching is irrelevant for constitutional jurisprudence and thus divorce moral principles from legal ones. Both resolve the tension by removing one side of the equation. Neither is satisfactory.

Undoubtedly, we do not want judges to act immorally, but at the same time, we do not want them to replace legal analysis with personal moral conclusions, no matter how much we agree with them.

Similarly, we recognize that no one acts, even in public, totally divorced from their moral principles, nor would we want them to. Fundamental principles shape our being, even if they do not supply all the answers. To ask a judge to ignore their moral principles asks them to engage in either artifice or deception. In the real world, Catholic judges—like judges of any religious, political or ideological disposition—must find a way to incorporate their religious convictions with the legal norms and constitutional provisions governing the actual cases before them.

Barrett on 'Catholic Judges in Capital Cases'

This is not a question Justice Barrett is unfamiliar with. One of her earliest academic articles was one she coauthored with John Garvey (now president of the Catholic University of America) for the Marquette Law Review on the question of Catholic judges and the death penalty. The article can form a helpful lens as we explore these topics.

Justice Barrett and Mr. Garvey focus on the question of whether Catholic judges can legitimately participate in death penalty cases at all, given the church's teaching. Although they are not theologians, their insights are helpful. They are asking the types of questions that individuals

> A judge who imposes his or her own moral principles walks a fine line between upholding his or her faith and undermining the rule of law.

trained in their respective fields will ask and are seeking to apply their own faith commitments in a complicated professional environment. For any professional field, this is exactly the sort of analysis we need.

Their analysis concludes, as it undoubtedly must, that faithful Catholic judges are "morally precluded from enforcing the death penalty." But this is not the end of the matter. There is the question of specifics. Justice Barrett and Mr. Garvey write that Catholic judges absolutely should not enter a sentence of death, either on their own or in accord with a jury recommendation. But judges do more in death penalty cases than simply sentence defendants, and the authors conclude that at least some of these roles are permissible.

A capital case has many steps, and judges take on many different roles during the process. First come the preliminaries to any trial—evidentiary motions, motions to dismiss and the like. Then comes the trial itself, which, in capital cases, is bifurcated; a verdict of guilty must precede a separate sentencing trial. After the verdict and sentencing, there are numerous stages of review in appellate courts. For Justice Barrett and Mr. Garvey, the only clearly impermissible stage for a Catholic judge is the sentencing portion of a bifurcated trial. All other stages involve not the admission of the inadmissible but instead legal or factual questions tangential to that fundamental question.

This reasoning seems most plausible when applied to the pre-sentencing portions of a trial. Questions about what evidence is admissible, or whether there is sufficient evidence to even convict a defendant, do not involve the question of punishment at all. Yet, post-sentencing, during the process of appellate review, the punishment seems more fraught. After all, whatever the basis for the appeal, a judge's rejection of it will lead inexorably to an execution.

Justice Barrett and Mr. Garvey acknowledge this fact. They further conclude that there is no clear answer to the question of the morality of the appellate judicial process in capital cases. For them, it must be judged on a case-by-case basis. Judges in most death penalty appeals are not asked to weigh the morality of the death penalty directly. Instead they are asked, "Did the lower courts and judges act in conformity with law?" Or they may be asked, "Is this death sentence consistent with constitutional norms?" There is a contrast between the sentencing judge, who orders an execution, and an appellate judge, who reviews that decision for legal propriety. The authors note that, at most, an appellate judge in these circumstances is limited simply to affirming a judgment or ordering the trial judge to redo their prior work; appellate judges in these cases could not simply order a non-capital sentence. This role, for Justice Barrett and Mr. Garvey, seems to be morally permissible (in the abstract, at least).

They do acknowledge, however, that this does not resolve the moral question. The nuance involved in appellate review is often lost on non-experts. This can lead to the real scandal of it appearing that Catholic judges are allowing executions regardless of church teaching. If it appears that Catholic leaders (Catholic justices on the Supreme Court!) are endorsing the death penalty, then there seems to be room for Catholics who otherwise have

to make judgments about capital punishment—jurors, voters, lawyers, governors or presidents—to likewise endorse it. So the question is not whether a judge is admitting the inadmissible (they may not be, given the particular case under review), but whether their actions lead others into sinful behavior. If so, then the moral question is not resolved by simply pointing to the specific legal questions under review.

For these reasons, Justice Barrett and Mr. Garvey conclude that the work of appellate judges cannot be easily resolved the way pre-sentencing or sentencing work can. It requires a case-by-case evaluation.

This is not a wholly satisfactory answer to the issues raised. Where it offers clear answers, such clarity is probably not needed; most would agree that a judge's decision to admit testimony, even if it moves a capital case closer to verdict, is a morally neutral position. And the sight of a Catholic judge directly ordering someone to the execution chamber should give any of us who adhere to church teaching significant pause. The real question remains what to do with appellate judges, particularly when their faith is part of their public profile. The fact is, there may not be a clear answer.

The question of recusal

The questions raised in Mr. Hall's appeal to the Supreme Court were technical and somewhat arcane. Did the government need to obtain a prescription in order to use the drugs with which they killed him? If so, did failure to obtain a prescription authorize a court to stop the execution? Reasonable minds can disagree on the answers to those questions. And these questions do not seem to have an appreciable moral valence in and of themselves.

At the same time, Mr. Hall is dead, killed by the government of the United States in the name of the people. His death is morally repugnant, an assault upon his dignity as a child of God, made in God's own image, and upon the people in whose name it was done. It was an inadmissible act.

As Justice Barrett and Mr. Garvey noted, there is no simple resolution. A judge who imposes his or her own moral principles in these circumstances walks a fine line between upholding his or her faith and undermining the rule of law. We may cheer an end to the death penalty, but what about judges whose religion imposes objectionable views on sexuality, economics, abortion or democracy itself? At the same time, a judge who ignores personal moral principles is just this side of an amorality that will lead to the unbending reality of law untempered by mercy or justice. Neither can be accepted.

Justice Barrett and Mr. Garvey do have one suggestion, and it can be expanded upon to perhaps offer a word of hope, if not total satisfaction. Their article focused on the question of recusal: When should judges not participate in cases? They concluded that American law does not require Catholic judges to recuse themselves in death penalty cases. (Their arguments are interesting, if beyond the scope of this essay.) Yet they conclude that a space exists for judges to make the choice to recuse. And they consider this to be a powerful and morally appropriate position to take.

"Judges," they say, "cannot—nor should they try to—align our legal system with the Church's moral teaching whenever the two diverge. They should, however, conform their own behavior to the Church's standard." Imagine the witness! Imagine Catholic justices declining to participate in capital cases. As a practical matter, it would have little effect; federal laws require a quorum of six Supreme Court justices. In the absence of a quorum, the court simply affirms the decision under review without precedential effect. But it would be the effect of Christ refusing to condemn the woman caught in adultery. It would be a profound witness to the country that might even force a reckoning in ways no papal document ever could.

And it seems this is the better way forward than accusing our sisters and brothers in Christ of bad faith. It is a better choice than trying to navigate which executions would cause scandal and which would not. It may even be a helpful lens for other controversial legal issues that have moral or religious implications. Alas, it might lead to challenges, of judges shirking their duty or even imposing their beliefs (to the extent one can impose something by not doing anything). Whatever else, though, it will be a sign and example that faith still has a meaningful role to play in our judicial system.

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Paying Attention in Prayer

By James Martin

How can I tell what's coming from God and what's coming from me?

Not long ago a woman came to me for spiritual direction. As most spiritual directors do, I started by setting out some guidelines: how often to meet, what times, what direction will entail.

Then I asked her what she hoped for in spiritual direction. The first thing she said was, "I want help in understanding what's coming from God and what's coming"—she pointed to her head—"just from *here*."

As this woman realized, not everything that pops into your head comes directly from God. Of course all prayer is mediated through our consciousness, but when I say, "What's coming from God and what's coming from me?" most people know what I am talking about. There is a difference between God's voice and our voice.

Let's say you are praying about the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes, the Gospel story in which Jesus feeds an immense crowd with only a few loaves and fishes. You reach the phrase "loaves and fishes," and the word "fish" hits you. You remember a bad meal you

Jack Sharp/ Unsplash

If you are feeling despair, hopelessness or uselessness, this is not coming from God.

had last week at a seafood restaurant. You're still not sure if it was food poisoning, but it definitely came from that salmon mousse. Your mind wanders, and you promise yourself never to return to the restaurant.

After a while you think, *What is God telling me her Am I not supposed to follow Jesus? Is following Jesus somehow going to make me sick?*

In response I would say that this is probably something that just popped into your mind and there may not be any deep message here. It is most likely a distraction.

Now imagine that you are praying with that same passage, and something different comes up. You have a desire to sit down and eat with Jesus. Not simply out of physical hunger, but out of a desire to be with him. You imagine how good it would be to spend time with him, as a companion. You have never thought about what it would mean to eat a meal with Jesus, and then you have a memory of eating with your beloved grandfather when you were younger. He was always so kind and listened so attentively to you, as if you were the only person in the world, even though you were just a child. Your grandfather made you feel special and loved. You see him as a real wisdom figure.

Strangely, you start to think of Jesus in the same way that you do your grandfather—someone you would want to spend time with, someone who loves you.

That second memory sounds different from the first, doesn't it? So what distinguishes the two? How can I discern what's coming from God and what's coming from me? What's a distraction and what's not? Or perhaps a better way to put it is: What should I pay attention to?

Let me be clear: There is no one way to discern these things, and what I offer here are only a few questions to ask in these situations, which I've found helpful in my own life and in helping others in their prayer.

First, is the "evil spirit" involved?

Let's return to your getting sidetracked by a thought about that piece of bad fish. If that causes you anxiety, disquiets your spirit, or moves you away from your prayer, it may indeed be not simply a distraction, but what St. Ignatius Loyola calls the "evil spirit," an impulse that moves you away from God and prevents your spiritual progress.

In this case, the evil spirit is trying to move you away from God or, more precisely, the evil spirit is *using* the distraction to do so. The last thing that the evil spirit wants is for you to get closer to God. Even using a piece of fish will do, for its purposes. Likewise, you could be thinking of following Jesus and then start to think, *If I follow him, I'll probably have to work with the poor, and then I'll get sick! Just like when I ate that fish*. That's clearly not coming from God either.

In general, the evil spirit tries to move you toward either evil purposes or, initially, a feeling of despair and hopelessness. As St. Ignatius writes in the *Spiritual Exercises*, in a good person the evil spirit seeks to "cause gnawing anxiety, to sadden and to set up obstacles. In this way he unsettles them by false reasons aimed at preventing their progress."

A simple way to understand it is that if you are feeling despair, hopelessness or uselessness, this is not coming from God, because, as Ignatius understood, these feelings lead to the "prevention of progress" in life.

Also beware of the "universal" language that is usually characteristic of despair, especially when coupled with negative statements about yourself. Anytime you find yourself saying things like "*Nothing* will ever get better," "*Everyone* hates me," "*No one* loves me," "I'm *always* failing," or "I'll *never* be able to change," it's often a sign of the presence of the evil spirit. Catch yourself when you use those universal terms and try not to listen to those impulses. By contrast, writes Ignatius, the "good spirit," the spirit that leads to God, is one that acts as follows: "It is characteristic of the good spirit to stir up courage and strength, consolations, tears, inspirations, and tranquility. He makes things easier and eliminates all obstacles, so that the person may move forward in doing good."

The evil spirit can be recognized when you feel despair; the good spirit when you feel hope.

So when you are trying to discern what is and what is

not coming from God, this is a good place to start.

Let me give you an example from my own life. For some time as a young man I struggled with a mild case of hypochondria. It was not debilitating, but it made me overemphasize physical problems and be overly fearful of getting sick; in the process it led me to focus on my own well-being in a selfish way.

Twenty years ago I was slated to have some surgery, which brought up a welter of emotions and triggered some hypochondria—and some "universal thinking": "This is the worst thing *ever*." "I'm *always* getting sick." "I'm *never* going to be able to get through this."

But I also felt a pull in the other direction: toward greater freedom, toward a letting go of the overweening ego that always made me focus on myself, toward hope.

In the midst of this, I saw my spiritual director. So I laid it out in the form of a question. "It's a new experience," I told him, "of feeling freedom and hope when it comes to illness. Yet I feel pulled back to the despairing feeling. And that feels like the evil spirit. But the more thoughtful, positive, hopeful feeling, even though it's new, seems as though it might be coming from God. That's a new place for me to live, but I'm wondering: Is that the good spirit?"

He practically leapt out of his chair and shouted, "Yes!"

When you feel despair, don't listen to it; when you feel hope, follow it.

Second, does it make sense?

If I am praying during a difficult time in my life, and I spontaneously remember another time when God was with me during my struggles, perhaps I can see in that memory God's desire for me to trust. Or perhaps I have a memory of a place that brings me a great deal of calm, and I relax. This is one way that God has of calming us.

By contrast, if I am praying during a difficult time and remember an email that I forgot to answer, the thought may not be coming from God. In the context of what I'm praying about, it doesn't fit. Remember, you want to know if it makes sense. Does it make sense that God would reach out to me and invite me to trust? Yes, that seems to make sense, or at least squares with what is going on in my life at the moment. Does it make sense that during a period of prayer about something serious God would remind me to answer my emails? Probably not.

Third, does it lead to an increase in love and charity?

This standard comes from the Gospel of Matthew, i which Jesus says, "You will know them by their fruits." God's voice can be known by its effects. If following this impulse leads to an increase in charity and love, then it is most likely coming from God.

Let's say you are praying about someone you dislike. Perhaps you are asking God for help in dealing with this person. Suddenly you get enraged by something that he has done to you. *Oh, I would love to just punch him in the face!* you think.

Vinita Hampton Wright, author of *Days of Deepening Friendship*, offers a way of understanding these feelings. You would probably realize that even though you had that feeling during your prayer, God is not moving you to punch this fellow in the face. So you move from that initial desire to thinking about how you might confront him about some fault of his that drives you crazy. You might even pray about what you would like to tell him about his fault—to get things off your chest. That seems to make sense, so you might be tempted to think that God was behind it.

"Yet upon further reflection," as Vinita explained, "you realize that the confrontation might be quite satisfying to you but would probably not increase your love for this person, nor would it help move this person to change for the better—so, no increase in love or charity."

If an action doesn't lead to an increase in love and charity— somewhere—its impetus is probably not coming from God.

Fourth, does it fit with what I know about God?

Does it fit with the God you know from Scripture, tradition and your own experience? If you are a Christian, does it fit with what you know about Jesus?

God is not going to make you hate yourself or believe that nothing can ever go right again, because that's not the God of the Old or New Testament, that's not the God of church tradition, that's not the God revealed in Jesus, and that's not the God you know. God gives hope, not despair.

For many people God is often manifested in a feeling of calm. As this happens for you, you can start to recognize what God "feels" like in prayer. St. Ignatius started to see that this was the way God worked in him.

In a sense, you come to know God's voice, so that when you hear it again you can recognize it.

Fifth, is it a distraction?

Sometimes it is obvious that a stray thought that comes into your head may not be from God. If you're praying, your stomach growls and you think about having a nice hamburger with all the trimmings, that notion is probably not

coming from God. The more you pray, the more you will be able to sift through distractions.

Think of it as a conversation with a friend. If you are talking with someone about an important issue and you suddenly notice a spot on your shirt, get sidetracked and start complaining that the dry cleaner ruined your clothes, you would realize that you are distracted.

It is the same in prayer. You can usually tell what is part of the conversation and what is not. Likewise, with practice you can tell when a distraction is an invitation to another, new conversation.

Sixth, is it wish fulfillment?

This is perhaps the most difficult question, and one not often addressed in books on prayer. How can you tell if it is what you wish God would say to you?

This is where it's especially important to test things out. Sometimes what we want to hear is indeed what God tells us. If you're anxious, pray to God for relief, and feel calmer, that is probably God. There is nothing wrong with getting what you want in prayer. This is not necessarily wish fulfillment; it is God giving you what you need.

By contrast, you need to be careful not to simply conjure up the response in prayer that you desire. The best antidote for this is patience, waiting for the time when God speaks clearly.

Often in these situations it takes time, and the way God responds is not the way that we would initially imagine God responding. Thomas Green, S.J., author of *Opening to God*, writes, "If the prayer is authentic, God comes when I don't expect it, and sometimes when I would prefer God not come, so that I find myself not controlling the situation."

Seventh, is it important?

In my experience, God enters our prayer in these direct ways most often when there is an important matter at hand. This is not to say that God cannot enter our consciousness whenever God wants or about any matter whatsoever. But usually (again, in my own life and in my experience as a spiritual director) if this entrance comes during a time of urgency, it can be taken as a sign of God's presence.

Discerning what is coming from God and what may be coming from you is more an art than a science. But it's an especially important art to master in the spiritual life.

James Martin, S.J., *is editor at large of* ***America****. This essay is excerpted from his new book* Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone *(HarperOne).*

Watch videos of James Martin, S.J. discussing the following topics from his new book online at **youtube.com/americamedia.**

1. Why you should pray
2. What is prayer?
3. What happens when you pray?
4. Overcoming distractions and other obstacles to prayer
5. What is spiritual direction?
6. How to pray (kinds of prayer): Ignatian contemplation, lectio divina, examen

Your Presence Is Requested

By MK Punky

When invitations arrived on consecutive days
for two funerals
both friends
one a lover
he pawed through his closet
like a bear in a blackberry bramble
and found his one black suit
unsuitable for public consumption
delicious to moths with an appetite for tropical weight wool
keen to teach their evolutionary superiors
the infinite depth
inside a newly announced hole

MK Punky *is the author of the novel* Year 14, the memoirs The Smart Money *and* The Unexpected Guest, *and the travelogue* Ella in Europe.

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Photo provided by Brooklyn Jesuit Prep

‘All of Our Kids Are in the Building’

By Ricardo da Silva

Mario Powell, S.J., explains why Brooklyn Jesuit Prep stayed open amid a pandemic

Editor’s note: Jesuit School Spotlight is a new monthly feature focusing on Jesuit middle and secondary schools from around the country. It is underwritten in part by Jesuit high schools of the Northeast Province of the Society of Jesus.

Public schools in the largest school district in the United States were ordered closed beginning on Nov. 19 as New York City residents saw a sustained rise in positive Covid-19 infections. But not all schools in the city closed their doors. Mario Powell, S.J., is the president of one of the New York schools that remained open, Brooklyn Jesuit Prep, which is in the predominantly Black and poor neighborhood of East Flatbush in Brooklyn, N.Y.

“We are open 100 percent and in person—all of our kids are in the building,” Father Powell told me, adding that this has been the case since the start of the school year, save for a three week period of required shutdown due to high numbers of cases in part of the neighborhood.

I interviewed Father Powell for **America**, to ask him about his school and how they have managed to stay open while maintaining a low rate of positive coronavirus cases. Our conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Tell me about your school.

Brooklyn Jesuit Prep is a Nativity school in East Flatbush, N.Y. *[Editor’s note: The NativityMiguel Coalition is a network of schools that deliver a faith-based education to students in low-income communities.]* We are 100 percent students of color. We are about 85 percent Black, 15 percent Latino. Ninety-five percent of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Our children’s families have an average annual income of about $27,000.

How can the city’s Catholic schools stay open while public schools have been forced to close?

If this pandemic didn’t show us now that education and educators, teachers and schools are absolutely an essential part of our society, nothing will. Whether public or private, this is where students get their breakfast and lunch and snacks. This is where students feel safe from home environments that may not be stable. This is where students are getting emotional and social support and learning and growth.

I think Catholic schools have shown through the leadership of so many people that we can [stay open]. Give us the guidelines from experts, and we’ll spend the money—that includes poor schools like the one that I run. We will spend what is necessary to keep our kids safe because we think it is vital that education and all the rest of the support services that we provide are done in-person.

You've fought the threat of closure before and even threatened legal action, so keeping schools open is something you feel strongly about. Would that be right?
I would say that is an understatement. The infection rate was spiking in the Jewish population [in West Flatbush]. East Flatbush, where my school is, had not at that point spiked. And so we pushed back against it. We were forced to close.

But the reason why I felt very strongly about it, outside of a common-sense angle, was because of the folks that are hurt the most by the switch to virtual learning: Black, brown and poor people. They have fewer options. Their access to technology, having a stable work environment at home and even having an adult at home is all going to be less than their white counterparts, whose families earn more money. When I hear folks criticize me for my desire to remain open, I push back because I want them to come spend some time here in Brooklyn and ask our families what they want. Our families overwhelmingly want the school to be open.

How do you strike the balance between keeping the children in school and keeping the school community safe from infection?
I think the number one thing is safety. The amazing thing about kids is: You can teach them the importance of safety. You can teach them the importance of washing their hands, of disinfecting their work areas and wearing masks. And the great thing is: They will actually listen and follow directions when you make that a priority of the community that they exist in. So for me, that's number one: teaching your students to buy into not just wearing masks or washing your hands or disinfecting your work area but a culture of safety within your school.

What's also on the top of my mind are my faculty and staff. I have a faculty person who is pregnant. I have another faculty person who's immunocompromised. And so when I say it's about inculcating a culture of safety, it is truly about people's lives and making sure that we take them seriously enough. At the same time, you balance that with the fact that if you take a poll in my school building, 100 percent of the people would say this is exactly where we should be.

Could you share some anecdotes about the highlights and lowlights of these months in the life of your school?
I would say the highlight is that in the midst of the pandemic we've renovated a building and moved. Our old building was tired and worn, and our new building is just bright and beautiful. It's not that I needed someone to say this, but I remember overhearing a student say, as they were walking around this building, "Are we rich now?"

The low end of that is hearing from one of our counselors about one of our parents that was laid off due to Covid-19 and knowing that so many of our families have been inordinately impacted by this. It was just a reminder for me that the work that I do on behalf of this community—on behalf of this largely immigrant, Black community that has been really made extremely vulnerable by the virus—is worth it.

What about the Jesuit mission and Catholic identity at school? How do you think that the coronavirus has brought that into relief?
I joke with folks that if you haven't learned how to pray in the last couple of months, I don't know if anything is going to get you to pray. We began the year with the Mass of the Holy Spirit. We did it outside in the parking lot. The thing that just kept coming to mind as we were preparing the kids for that liturgy was really a very Ignatian thing: gratitude.

It's wonderful for you to teach your kids to say "thank you" when something has been freely given to them. But I think in a very Ignatian way, what we've been trying to do since the Mass of the Holy Spirit has been trying to inculcate a real culture of gratitude...inculcating a sense of gratitude that there's nothing that we can do to earn all the gifts that God has given us.

Religiously, we are pretty diverse. We have about 40 percent Catholics, maybe another 40 percent evangelical. We have Muslim students. And gratitude speaks across religions, religious divides and religious culture.

What leaves you with hope?
At our Wednesday assembly [on Nov. 14] our principal presented on Ruby Bridges, a young Black girl attempting to desegregate her elementary school. There was an image of Ruby being led by a police officer into her school—all our kids were in their individual home rooms, and we're doing this assembly via Zoom—and the principal asked how many kids know who this young girl is. And so many hands shot up in the air.

What gave me hope out of that was that our kids have a sense of ownership over their own history. And no matter what challenges come their direction—whether it's a virus, whether it's continued racism or segregation within this country—no one's going to take away their history. No one's going to take away their knowledge of their history. And that will allow them always to have strength and power.

Ricardo da Silva, S.J., *from South Africa, is an associate editor of* ***America*** *and an ordained deacon.*

The Conversion of Mary Lou Williams

By Michael Scott Alexander

Mary Lou Williams performs with friends in her New York apartment, August 1947. Opposite page: Mary Lou Williams, third from left. This page: Milt Orent, at the piano, second from left; Dizzy Gillespie, third from left

In 1954 in Paris, the pianist Mary Lou Williams walked off the jazz bandstand at age 44, suddenly and at the very height of her fame. She had finally succumbed to her midlife panic and bouts of self-loathing that were enough to make just about anyone want simply to exit the stage. Thus began a chain of events leading to her conversion to Catholicism and to a new life's purpose in composing jazz Masses worthy of performance at the Vatican. More than this, Williams came to write "Mary Lou's Mass" *to capture her feeling of suffering—and its apotheosis. She was helped in this mission by a young Jesuit priest and jazz devotee, Peter O'Brien, who became her manager, confidant, lifelong friend and eventually her archivist.*

Hazel Scott's visit and counsel to pray launched an abrupt beginning for Mary Lou, a veritable new life.

Central to her story is the swing rhythm itself. When locked into this rhythm, one's whole body follows the pattern of a wave—over a curve, crest after crest, building up and letting go, and always propelling forward. Mary Lou Williams was recognized even in her youth to be among the greatest masters of this rhythm. In her maturity she decided to harness the power of that group feeling for a higher purpose—to remind people to take care of each other. But first she had to find her own way out of major depression.

•••

Following her breakdown in Paris, Mary Lou Williams spent several years recovering in Harlem, a time she later explained guardedly: "I just stayed in the house for two years; I turned the radio on once, heard Art Tatum had died, and turned it off again."

Art Tatum had been Mary Lou's contemporary at the piano, and the loss certainly struck her. Yet her first years back in Harlem, nursing what appears to have been major depression, hadn't ensued quite so simply. In fact, it had taken a good deal just to get Mary Lou back to the States at all. When she walked off the stage of Le Boeuf sur le Toit in Paris, she did so without a clue about her future. She no longer had any vision, no basic daily plan, let alone a purpose for her life. In fact, in her mind she had certainty of just one thing: *Music had failed her*. Surely she had pursued the art to the very precipice of her considerable talent, intellect and human energy. What had it achieved? Apparently it had led to an alcoholic breakdown, while similar musical energies were leading a preponderance of her colleagues and friends to early deaths, including the recent death of Garland Wilson, her colleague and best friend in Paris. And she had premonitions about the death of her heroin-addicted young friend Charlie Parker that would all too soon come true. The music they had all so adored and served to the point of veneration had failed Mary Lou as it seemed to have failed most everyone around her.

She had only gotten back to Harlem at all through the considerable support of her closest friends. The pianist Hazel Scott, visiting Paris that summer in 1954, after months of searching finally located Mary Lou holed up in the suburban home of a young Parisian boyfriend who still lived with his grandmother. There Hazel Scott accomplished two things that saved her friend's life. First, she arranged Mary Lou's fare home to Harlem from a wealthy European jazz patron. Second, Hazel Scott told Mary Lou to start praying. Specifically she told her to start reading Psalms.

"This great and wonderful talent introduced me to what really saved me—*God*—that is what I was searching for," Mary Lou wrote of Hazel in her diary.

"Had always kept a Bible around," she explained in these initial notes of her realization, "but obviously could not reach Him—allow me to say He is the greatest and in pure musician's language the grooviest."

"Just think," she had concluded, "one can still have as much fun—yet observe 10 commandments, etc. By all means try to love, even love your enemies for 'God is Love.' Just think He sent me a messenger and I tried to turn my back on Him—but the guy was patient."

That had been Mary Lou's immediate report of her awakening. It had happened suddenly. Before this there had been just inklings brought on by tourist visits to cathedrals throughout Paris as well as some private investigations into occult books. But Hazel Scott's visit and counsel to pray launched an abrupt beginning for Mary Lou, a veritable new life.

Of course, sudden inspiration was not the final realization of her new spiritual composition. It could only offer a few notes and phrases toward a beginning. Mary Lou would soon come to consider this initial inspiration as the right first step down a long

and still difficult path. "It was torture as I groped there in the dark trying to make contact with God," she explained to readers of the African-American magazine Sepia in April of 1958.

> Slowly, however, the deep spell of despondency that had held me in its grasp for days began to lift and I saw things I have never seen before in my mind's eye.
>
> Bright things, clean and pure...beautiful things, people—not ugly, drab and sinful as I knew them, but people who were living and acting as they should—as children of God.
>
> In my efforts to get through to God, I felt great relief. For the first time in days, the cloud lifted and I began to feel like living again. I asked God which way I should go.

Now Mary Lou could hope with some confidence that her path might be long, that she need not necessarily suffer the same miserable demise of so many friends and colleagues, and that finally she might still do something significant with her life. Although no longer trusting her music, she still didn't know what her purpose could be.

Her divine messenger, Hazel Scott, managed to get Mary Lou back to Harlem and settled in her old apartment. It still held her white rug and beloved Baldwin piano, though Mary Lou now barely acknowledged the instrument. The keys no longer held any attraction for her, still symbolizing as they did the instrument of her demise. So she left the piano there in the living room untouched. She didn't have people over anymore either, not like in the old days. She just stayed at home and meditated and prayed or sometimes walked about the neighborhood. She later rightly acknowledged these years as a period of retreat and of self-treatment for depression.

Wandering the Streets

In its earliest days, Hazel Scott came around each Sunday to gather Mary Lou for prayer at the Abyssinian Baptist Church, Harlem's great Gothic and Tudor revival edifice on 138th Street. There Hazel Scott happened to reign as first lady, the wife to Reverend Adam Clayton Powell Jr., also Harlem's delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives. Hazel Scott herself was Trinidad born and still Catholic, though she attended her husband's Baptist ministry most often. Mary Lou participated fervently from the pews, often lingering after services to continue reciting Psalms or to offer her own direct words of prayer.

Then one weekday, when the Baptist church was closed and the people of Harlem bustled through the business of the day, Mary Lou found herself simply wandering the streets. She did not exactly go about aimlessly, but rather she looked for some meaningful venue in which to perform her life. Then, on 142nd Street and Seventh Avenue, she made a fateful and inspired discovery. She saw the open doors of Our Lady of Lourdes Church and was drawn to peek inside. "The Catholic Church was the only one I could find open anytime of day," she later said.

There, in the strange Catholic pews, Mary Lou Williams had an insight once shared by one who would become a patron saint of Europe, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, born Edith Stein. Stein, too, while in Frankfurt on vacation from her philosophical studies at the university, had also walked by a local Catholic cathedral to discover open doors and a curious gravitational pull to look within. There she saw what Mary Lou Williams also observed: people talking to God privately, personally, as though they had just come in for an informal chat in the middle of the busy day. The potential for this kind of intimate relationship with God impressed each of these women so deeply that both observers began feeling the pull to visit the cathedral as often as possible. Each found herself there most every day, remaining for hours of intimate conversation. They had each discovered the special quality of the Catholic cathedral to induce calm and meaning, especially through private prayer.

For both women, the young German Jew of 1916 and the middle-aged African-American of 1955, the feeling of prayer would become the shared arena of their spiritual contribution. It is not at all gratuitous to invoke the saint's name in comparison to the contributions of Mary Lou Williams herself, which is the amazing spiritual genius observable in the jazz Masses she would soon dedicate her life to composing.

'Everybody Should Pray Every Day.'

Mary Lou admitted that her early days in the Catholic Church had been enthusiastic and unsubtle, to say the least.

To help her in these early Catholic investigations, she located a willing

partner, Lorraine Gillespie. Besides Hazel Scott, Mary Lou found in New York upon her return an especially warm pair of friends in the Gillespies, Dizzy and Lorraine. Of all the musicians who had survived the bebop years, Dizzy was perhaps the most professionally and emotionally stable. He and Lorraine both, very early in Mary Lou's withdrawal and retreat, insisted on visiting their old friend in her apartment, often bearing gifts of food and valuables. While Dizzy himself at that time was not interested in pursuing any formal spiritual interests (he would become Baha'i in 1968), Lorraine was curious. She and Mary Lou became a set for the next several years as they went to Eucharist services at Lourdes Church, attended Jesuit classes at St. Ignatius Loyola Church on Park Avenue, and otherwise stopped by cathedrals and chapels throughout the city for more private rounds of silent prayer and divine conversation.

Soon enough, each of the women had gained the vigor of their newfound faith, but especially Mary Lou. "I got a sign that everybody should pray every day," she explained. (She said the sign came to her in the form of "sounds," but otherwise did not clarify what she meant by this, whether as words or perhaps as music). She rounded up everyone she could possibly bring with her to Lourdes Church services, including Bud Powell, Thelonious Monk (said to have fainted from fright upon entering the cathedral), Dizzy Gillespie when willing to appease his wife Lorraine, and Lucille Armstrong (Louis's wife). Miles Davis teased her gently by calling her "Reverend Williams." He kept asking her to record with him, but she still wasn't going anywhere near the piano.

Mary Lou owned a Royal typewriter that saw far more use in those years than her Baldwin upright piano; she constructed and mimeographed elaborate prayer instructions for distribution to friends and even offered these openly on street corners. Her notes included the following: "Prayers to be read every night before retiring"; "Prayers to say at the crucifix everyday"; "Daily Routines for praying." She constructed lists of dozens of saints and their areas of therapy and inspiration: for "writers"; "musicians, singers, television"; "orator, teachers, scholars"; "skin diseases, hospitals, invalid, headaches, insanity, nervous disease"; "lovers"; "impossible things"; "servants"; "retreats." She wrote directions for moving effectively about the many altars of the church while meditating. Her recommended cycle of prayer was 36 days, four times the length of the standard Catholic novena retreat period. She also advocated fasting.

"*Important*," she warned. "Start All Prayers Between 6 and 7 a.m. Christ arose around that time."

"*Urgent*: Read set of Psalms before retiring."

For herself, Mary Lou constructed her own private liturgy, typing out hundreds of numbered and collated names of family and friends to pray for. Her list covered her first husband John Williams and second husband Shorty Baker; old band leader Andy Kirk; Josh White, Paul Robeson, and Lena Horne from the Café Society nightclub in New York; Bud Powell and Thelonious Monk; the Gillespies; the Armstrongs; Hazel Scott and Adam Clayton Powell Jr.; Billy Strayhorn; Billie Holiday; Tadd Dameron; Mae and Mezz Mezzrow; Teddy Wilson; Duke Ellington; as well as Charlie Parker and Art Tatum while they were alive and then their souls after they passed suddenly in 1955 and 1956 respectively. Also on her list were the individuals and families of Cab Calloway, Ella Fitzgerald, Eartha Kitt, Joe Louis, Ida James, Rose Murphy, Nellie Lutcher, Bea Ellis, Nat King Cole, Roy Eldridge, Max Roach, Errol Garner, Oscar Peterson, Oscar Pettiford, Pearl and Bill Bailey, Johnny Hodges, Ben Webster, Billy Taylor, Sarah Vaughan, Stan Kenton, Nipsey Russell, her sister Mamie's "next door neighbors," "Joe the drummer," "the Palace Market guys," "the Amsterdam Bank messenger and family," and many more. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt somehow also made it into Mary Lou's prayers.

And always she prayed for the soul of Garland Wilson, her friend in Paris whose death had initiated her depression.

"What were you praying for?" a reporter asked her about those years of retreat and reflection.

"I was praying for people," she said. "I was praying for the world."

Michael Scott Alexander *is an associate professor and the Maimonides Endowed Chair in Jewish Studies in the religious studies department of the University of California, Riverside.* *This essay is excerpted from* Making Peace With the Universe: Personal Crisis and Spiritual Healing. *Copyright 2020 Columbia University Press. Used by arrangement with the publisher. All rights reserved.*

At the Border

By Tim J. Myers

So little is said about
those others who
endlessly cross the border
without permission:

lizards slipping under
the new wire

smirking coyote scenting
grouse

brown-gray javelinas
who seem to fancy themselves
lords of every country they set foot on

red-eared sliders who
work the Rio Grande

and always, in that
freedom which seems
to ignore our lines and preoccupations
as angels must ignore them,

always of course the

birds

Tim J. Myers *is a writer, songwriter, storyteller, visual artist and senior lecturer at Santa Clara University, Calif. His 16 children's books have won recognition from The New York Times, NPR and the Smithsonian. He has published five poetry collections, as well as a nonfiction book on fatherhood.*

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A Christ-haunted family

By Diane Scharper

The narrator of *The Discomfort of Evening* is a 10-year-old girl who lives on a farm in the Netherlands.

Poetry spills out almost everywhere in *The Discomfort of Evening*, the debut novel by 29-year-old Marieke Lucas Rijneveld. Translated by Michele Hutchison, it won the 2020 International Booker Prize. The chairperson of the judges, Ted Hodgkinson, called the novel "a tender and visceral evocation of a childhood caught between shame and salvation, and a deeply deserving winner."

I largely agree with his assessment, although the novel's tender moments are few.

One such moment occurs as the novel opens, when Jas, the story's child protagonist and narrator, and her family are preparing for Christmas. The mother is bathing the children when someone comes to the door to tell her that her oldest son, Mattheis, has fallen through thin ice while skating and has died. The developing story concerns the effect his death has on the family and how they cope with their loss for close to three years.

At first, the mother is confused and believes her son is still alive. Jas and her sister, Hanna, think their brother is playing a game and will return home shortly, since Christmas is only two days away. When their parents throw out the Christmas tree and give away the presents and the food, they realize Mattheis will not return. That, says Jas, "was when the emptiness began." Everyone changes for the worse during that emptiness.

Jas tries to understand why God would punish her and her family by letting her brother drown. Worse, she thinks his death might be her fault. Believing that her pet rabbit is destined for the stew pot, she tries to make a deal with God, asking him to take her brother instead of the rabbit. But when he does so, she is devastated. As this novel tells a story about Jas's feelings of guilt, it also focuses on her fear of death and her obsession with it. In that sense, it is reminiscent of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*—although from the point of view of a 10-year-old.

Jas lives on a farm in the Netherlands across the river from a city where vice supposedly thrives. Her family takes the Bible literally and sees God not as a loving father but as a punitive master. They do not pray to God as much as they hear his words reproaching them.

As devout members of the Dutch Orthodox Reformed Church, the parents strictly monitor their children and do not allow them access to the internet except for school projects. They study the Bible and have most of it memorized. Biblical passages rumble through Jas's head in a stream-of-consciousness fashion. She believes that her father is close friends with God, while she is not. She considers herself a sinner and a pedophile even though she does not know the meaning of the term.

According to Rijneveld, this is not the novel that she wanted to write but the one she had to write. Rijneveld

The Discomfort of Evening
By Marieke Lucas Rijneveld
(translated from the Dutch by Michele Hutchison)
Graywolf Press
296p $16

says she needed to retell the story of the death of her own older brother but seen through the eyes of Jas—with whom she shares several traits. Rijneveld's brother died after being hit by a bus on his way to school when she was 3 years old. This personal tragedy gives her writing an air of authenticity.

This book follows Rijneveld's first collection of poetry, *Calfskin*, (2015) which won several prestigious awards, including the C. Buddingh Prize for a best poetry debut. This novel is as much poetry as it is prose, and it is not surprising that Rijneveld wrote both books simultaneously. Some of the poems in the novel seem to work better than the prose, mostly because the poems are presented in tight little individual knots of feeling while the prose is looser and covers much more territory. It also drags at times.

One poem, "Hollow Enough to Hide an Echo," is a microcosm of the novel, which expands upon several of the poem's images. One of the most powerful shows the narrator's hands falling upon "the glass pane of my brother's coffin like two/ damp starfish." Another powerful image concerns the sounds of night with "the dead brother, constantly in our hearts, being driven up [from the sea] again."

That image suggests the discomfort pointed to by the title and Jas's tendency to obsess over her brother's death at night, when she is unable to sleep. Both situations appear in the novel and seem to haunt Jas, who imagines her brother's face as it appeared in his coffin.

Jas is, in some ways, a typical middle child. Resenting the privileges of her older brother, Obbe, she wonders why she is not treated with the same deference. But she is also left out of the warmth (what little there is) given to her younger sister, Hanna.

Obbe has a sadistic nature and is given to acts of cruelty toward animals. On one gruesome occasion, he drowns his hamster in a glass of water, mimicking the death of their brother. He also performs sexually explicit acts in front of his two younger sisters.

On the verge of puberty, Jas is caught between her sexual curiosity and the God-talk she hears in her head. The God voice condemns such curiosity, as it does Obbe's cruelty and Jas picking her nose.

Hanna, the youngest child, is to some extent a vessel of grace in this story of adolescence gone awry. She loves and forgives her parents and siblings even when they mistreat her, as Jas does twice. Once she inexplicably tries to smother Hanna with a pillow. Later she pushes Hanna into the river and then saves her from drowning. Hanna says she will tell their parents that she slipped, and she willingly forgives her older sister. Jas, though, cannot forgive herself, a circumstance that makes this dark novel even darker.

When the cows develop hoof-and-mouth disease and must be destroyed, the parents fear they will lose their farm. Jas worries that her father will hang himself on the rope that dangles from the barn ceiling or that her mother will starve herself to death.

The novel is unsettling from the first sentence, when Jas notes that she has stopped taking off her red coat (which appears on the novel's cover). The red coat is suggestive of the story "Little Red Riding Hood" and of the dangers that Jas faces. Making the sentence more interesting is that the word *jas* means coat, according to a comment by the translator, Michelle Hutchinson.

As readers wonder why Jas won't remove her coat, the storyline implies that she wants to hide the fact that she's developing. She also holds keepsakes in her pockets, believing that these items will keep her family safe. At the novel's end, readers learn the real and shocking reason for wearing the coat.

Rijneveld blends thoughts of murder and suicide into the plot along with quotes from the Old and New Testaments. The juxtaposition adds a certain irony to the narrative, as scenes of violence and the voice of God sit uneasily on the page.

Diane Scharper *is the author or editor of seven books. She is a lecturer for the Johns Hopkins University Osher Program in Maryland.*

Joseph A. Horne/Library of Congress

Pete Seeger at the opening of the Washington labor canteen in February 1944. First lady Eleanor Roosevelt is seen at center.

In the cross hairs of the F.B.I.

By Joe Pagetta

On Aug. 27, 1949, Paul Robeson, the All-American footballer, opera star and popular music performer of "Ol' Man River" and other songs, was set to headline a benefit concert in Peekskill, about 30 miles north of New York City. Presented by People's Artists, a union music organization co-founded by Pete Seeger, the concert was to benefit the Harlem chapter of the Civil Rights Congress for the defense of individuals accused under the 1940 Smith Act of being members of the Communist Party USA.

While no evidence of Robeson being a card-carrying member exists, he was nevertheless a committed supporter of the party. Robeson was vocal in his opposition to the Ku Klux Klan, Jim Crow laws and the colonization of Africa. Weeks before the concert, he had appeared at the World Peace Concert in Paris, where he said that "it was on the backs of white workers from Europe and on the backs of millions of Blacks that the wealth of America was built...we resolve to share it equally [and] reject any hysterical raving that urges us to make war on anyone." Robeson was, as they say, political.

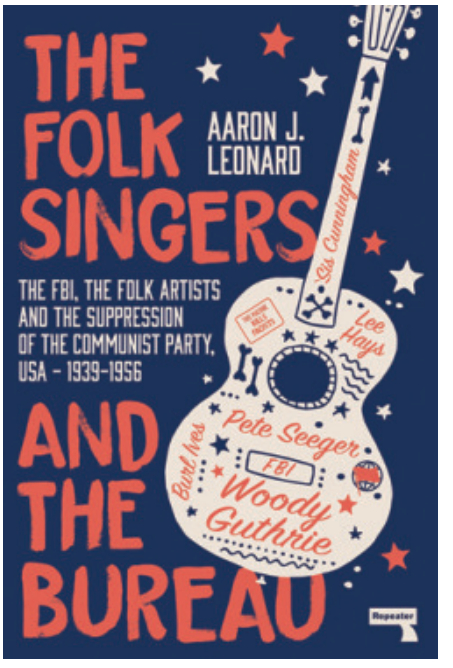
The concert never happened.

An editorial about the concert in The Peekskill Evening News told readers that "like most folks who put America first, we're a little doubtful of...finding the luster in the once illustrious name of Paul Robeson now almost hidden by political tarnish" and "the time for tolerant silence that signifies approval is running out." That evening, before the concert, a parade organized by the Joint Veterans Council grew to a mob of 5,000 people that converged on the concert area, turned off the generator, broke and burned the stage, beat young Jewish and Black men, and vandalized cars. An eyewitness recounted being terrified as the mob rocked his car and shouted racist epitaphs. The Daily Worker reported K.K.K. involvement and a burning cross.

Aaron J. Leonard's new book, *The Folk Singers and the Bureau,* draws from almost 10,000 pages of F.B.I. files on an array of folk artists. It aims to illustrate the considerable impact that the U.S. government's campaign against Communism had on folk artists in the 1940s and early '50s. Among the artist files Leonard digs into in addition to Robeson's are those on Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, the archivist Alan Lomax, Lee Hays, Sis Cunningham, Millard Lampell, Josh White, Lead Belly, Aunt Molly Jackson, Bess Lomax Hawes, the Weavers, Burl Ives, Cisco Houston and more. All of them sat somewhere on the Communist Party spectrum, according to the F.B.I., whether they were legitimately card-carrying members or associated with it because they once attended a meeting or played a concert organized by the party.

The stigma associated with the singers and the party, as Leonard details, appeared to fluctuate with the country's relationship with the Soviet Union. The government had only a passing interest in the artists that were associated with the party prior to 1939; but once Stalin and Hitler signed the Molotov–Ribbentrop non-aggression

The Folk Singers and the Bureau
By Aaron J. Leonard
Repeater
323p $16.95



pact in 1939, surveillance increased. That changed less than two years later when the pact was broken and Germany invaded the Soviet Union. When the United States joined the war, artists like Seeger helped rally support.

Leonard describes in detail how months after Seeger and Guthrie stopped in Oklahoma City to visit Bob and Ina Woods, both members of the party in Oklahoma, and performed for a small group of striking oil workers, the party's headquarters at the Progressive Bookstore was raided because the group was accused of breaking a law that prohibited the circulation, sale, distribution or display of printed matter advocating or teaching "syndicalism," a term for taking over control of the economy. A few pages later, Leonard includes a photo of Seeger singing for Eleanor Roosevelt. Seeger, however, wouldn't get off that easy, even though he joined the Army in 1943.

In 2015, the F.B.I. released almost 2,000 pages of material on the folk singer, including a report that cautioned that Seeger might be subject to "divided loyalties" given his Communist affiliations. Equally troubling, considering the U.S. policy of interning Japanese Americans at the time, was that Seeger's wife, Toshi Ohta, was half Japanese. "This officer believes the Subject will be further influenced along questionable lines by his new wife...he protested what he considers to be the improper treatment of American-born Japanese."

Following the war, the Communist Party in the United States and the folk singers associated with it again faced suspicion, this time exacerbated by the Cold War. Leonard offers an anecdote to show what artists fighting for civil rights and anti-racism were up against in popular culture while under the surveillance of the F.B.I. In the 1948 presidential election, Henry Wallace, vice president under Roosevelt and commerce secretary under Henry Truman, ran as an independent against Truman himself, who was at the time still the incumbent. Wallace, while not a member of the Communist Party, was sympathetic to its causes and was willing to work with it. He also had supporters on the campaign trail in Robeson, a superstar at that time, and Seeger. The latter accompanied Wallace through the South, where the campaign refused to hold segregated meetings.

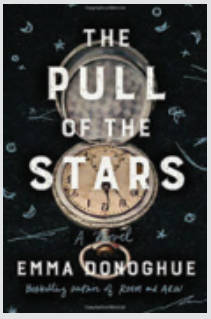
Wallace finished in fourth place in the election, with only 2.4 percent of the vote, coming in far behind not only Truman and Thomas E. Dewey, but also behind Strom Thurmond, the Southern segregationist, who kicked off his campaign by announcing that "there were not enough troops in the Army to force Southern people to admit Negroes into our theaters, swimming pools and homes."

As Leonard goes on to report in detail, folk artists associated with Communism were not only battling the general populace, the F.B.I. and the House Un-American Activities Committee, which was increasingly calling them to testify, but even the Communist Party itself, which slowly began to implode as key individuals became informants and its membership ultimately dwindled.

As Leonard reminds us, much of what happened to artists and U.S. citizens in general in the '40s and '50s, from imprisonments to fines and blacklists, "operated within the strictures of US democracy." Seeger was blacklisted and banned from performing on television until 1968. Robeson was denied a U.S. passport until 1958. Both have over time taken on elevated and iconic statuses in U.S. popular culture, their names ending up on institutions and awards and even postage stamps. But in their prime, Leonard writes, "they were treated as a first-order threat to the aims of the American century." Imagine the trajectory of their careers and their artistic output had they not.

The Folk Singers and the Bureau reminds us that "such is the tenuous nature of artistic and political freedom in the United States."

Joe Pagetta *is a museum professional, arts writer and essayist in Nashville, Tenn.*



The Pull of the Stars
By Emma Donoghue
Little, Brown and Company
304p $28

Humor and romance in a pandemic

Not many readers would confuse F. Scott Fitzgerald's Roaring '20s with Spanish Flu-ravaged Dublin. Yet there is an undeniably Gatsbyesque moment in Emma Donoghue's timely and touching new novel, set over the course of three days in 1918, at a hospital treating pregnant victims of this "uncanny plague, scything down swaths of men and women in the full bloom of their youth."

Donoghue's narrator, a nurse named Julia Power, tends to expectant mothers with ringworm, called "the brand of poverty," as well as the comparatively better off, with their "plump wrists" and "polished fingernails." Amid the "faecal, bloody tang of birth and death," Julia has a revelation: "Tomorrow, I'd be thirty."

It is not unlike the birthday revelation Fitzgerald's own narrator Nick Carraway has, as youth yields to a more perilous, even tragic age. Also like Nick, Julia is drawn to an alluring, mysterious figure who forces her to rethink how human nature—how God, how life—actually works.

The Pull of the Stars, which takes its title from the Italian origin of the word influenza, unfolds over the course of All Hallows' Eve, All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day—with a chatty cast of priests, nuns and philosophizing orderlies running about—adding to the sanctified air Donoghue establishes. Meanwhile, a world war and a pandemic rage beyond the hospital walls, and hard feelings linger from the doomed Easter Rising two years earlier. And if the Sinn Feiners are treated irreverently, a secretive Irish Catholic child care system that abused, exploited and dehumanized generations is cast in the justifiably harshest of lights.

Yet Donoghue also finds time for humor and romance. Moments in the hospital pass uneventfully, allowing Julia's mind to drift and race, at least until another life-and-death crisis erupts, a tension heightened by the fact that Donoghue has inserted just four text breaks in this entire narrative.

Donoghue was already deep into writing this book when the Covid-19 pandemic struck, and it is clear this is no rush job. She masterfully blends the personal and social into a simmering pot that rages to a boil as the final pages approach, when Julia is presented an opportunity to transcend the powerful constraints of her time, place and circumstances.

This will not change the fact that—as is made clear in this powerful, resonant novel—what Julia says about birth is also true about death. And love. And war, religion and history: "[It's] a messy business."

Tom Deignan, *a regular contributor to* ***America****, is a columnist for The Irish Voice newspaper, and has written about books for The New York Times, Washington Post and National Catholic Reporter.*

A Promised Land
By Barack Obama
Crown
768p $45

Policy and personality

Barack Obama's voice in his writing is almost as unmistakable as it is when he is speaking.

Perhaps because that baritone has become so unfailingly recognizable, it is difficult to sift through *A Promised Land*, the first volume of Mr. Obama's presidential memoirs, without hearing each story, from the most personally stirring to the most politically dry, in that distinctive timbre.

One of the strengths of *A Promised Land* is that through that voice and personality, readers get to know a host of colorful characters who played a role in the campaign for the presidency and Obama's first term in office. They include a fiercely opinionated Vice President Joe Biden, hilarious foils in Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, and a beloved friend in body man Reggie Love. Of course, constants in the story are Michelle Obama and the couple's daughters, Malia and Sasha, to whom the volume is dedicated.

Getting through a book of this length can be a bit arduous at times, in part because of Obama's desire to give every person and every debate a fair, (mostly) unbiased, two-sided shake in his descriptions. Before he lands on a criticism of anything or anyone, he provides detailed background. Even

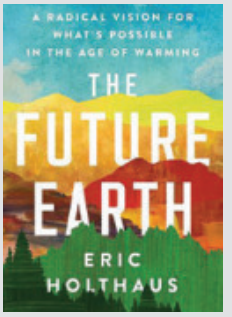
the most partisan debates get a "You have to understand that..." disclaimer, and even a few of Mitch McConnell's merits get airtime (although the former president's ultimate judgment on McConnell ends up being decidedly unfavorable).

Obama insists repeatedly that American ideals are worth our faith and that we as Americans are capable of collaboration and comity. Sometimes this insistence feels out of place, even outdated. Rather than providing a note of hope for what the country can be like, the notion seems like a figment from the past that does not hold much relevance in the year 2020.

Still, when one reads about the challenges of Obama's presidency, one gets the feeling that if this man can find a way to be optimistic about the state of the union, maybe it is not a hopeless cause. If his descriptions of the partisan gridlock and economic catastrophe of his first term don't convince one of the stresses of the job, the ending of this first volume—the account of the military operation that killed Osama bin Laden—will.

The release date for what promises to be a highly anticipated second installment of the former president's memoirs has yet to be announced; in light of Joe Biden's upcoming presidency, Obama's reminiscences of his second term may take on a new meaning for readers. Without a doubt, that unmistakable voice will be there telling his stories—policy chops and dad jokes and all.

Molly Cahill *is a 2020-21 O'Hare fellow at* ***America*** *and a recent graduate of Boston College.*



The Future Earth
A Radical Vision for What's Possible in the Age of Warming
By Eric Holthaus
HarperOne
247p $22.99

The rending of the planet

Eric Holthaus experiences climate change as a wound, a rending in the fabric of society and ecology. For Holthaus, addressing climate change is a moral imperative because of its ecological and social implications. He is not alone in this, of course; for nearly five years, Holthaus's Twitter profile prominently featured a quote from Pope Francis' "Laudato Si'."

While culture-war figures point to the "naturalness" of epochal cycles of warming and cooling (indeed, climate fluctuates!), what ecologists and ethicists and meteorologists and activists mean by "climate change" is the human-driven *intensification* of climate change. The robust amplification of baseline climate cycles has had unprecedented dramatic effects in a short time frame, such that variation in (literal) degrees becomes a difference in (moral) kind. What to do?

The Future Earth is Holthaus's attempt to answer that question. With diagnoses evocative of Bill McKibben's earlier book, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet,* Holthaus begins with descriptions of the ecological and social deluges of degradations wrought by climate change. He continues by imagining the "future earth"—and human societies' values—in the next several decades. This includes, of course, hoped-for policy changes. Beyond the pragmatics, Holthaus's invocations are ethical. "We" are responsible for writing the story that is unfolding into the future, and what is needed is reformation in human connection: "Somehow, some way, we have to learn how to care about one another again."

Indeed, the personal narrative and appeal—and his willingness to name explicitly the struggle to make sense of the climate crisis in his own life—is part of why many people are drawn to Holthaus's work. Perhaps the most lasting insight here is therefore Holthaus's suggestion that the individual actions that matter most are "the ones that help make you personally more connected to the world and everyone in it."

As an ethicist, I wanted more from this book, starting with a citational lineage in the pages (for example, the trope of imagined future climate-changed worlds goes back a long way, from Octavia Butler to Naomi Oreskes). And like many journalists, Holthaus personalizes scientific data via a personal-interest story; more extensive follow-ups might avoid a sense of climate disaster voyeurism.

Nonetheless, Holthaus is right: The future Earth will be shaped by those with the power either to fall asleep at the wheel or to consciously steer a different course. As Pope Francis might say, this task includes everyone.

Christiana Zenner *is an associate professor of theology, science and ethics at Fordham University in New York.*

His Healing Touch

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), FEBRUARY 7, 2021
READINGS: JB 7:1-7; PS 147; 1 COR 9:16-23; MK 1:29-39

Today's Gospel focuses on Jesus' public ministry as it unfolds in Mark. The Gospel highlights Jesus' interest and ability to heal, and it reminds us of the importance of care, especially for the sick and vulnerable.

After calling his first followers and healing a man with an unclean spirit, Jesus performs additional private and public healings. With four of his disciples, Jesus visits Simon's mother-in-law who is sick with a fever. "He grasped her hand, helped her up, and the fever left her." The act of taking the infirmed woman's hand reveals a gentleness in care. Jesus repeats this gesture when healing sick children later in the Gospel, restoring the lives of a young girl and boy by taking hold of their hands and lifting them up (Mk 5:39-42, 9:25-27).

Jesus performs a variety of types of healing in Mark, but in these three instances, an older woman and two young children receive a personal touch to facilitate their recovery. The texts are reminders of the need to offer loving care to one another. For people who work in health and wellness, the Gospel reminds us that their essential healing work enables people to recover, and their care for others emulates Jesus by helping the sick to be healed.

After Jesus touches the woman, she is healed and is able to serve the group as a sign of gratitude and as evidence of her recovery. Jesus continues his ministry by healing people with a variety of ailments. The next day Jesus intentionally distances himself in order to pray, an example of Jesus taking personal time to rest, center himself and give thanks for his ability to heal. The disciples say that people are searching for him, likely in hopes of additional healings, and Jesus' response is very telling about how he views his work. "Let us go on to the nearby villages that I may preach there also. For this purpose have I come."

At this early point in Mark, we have not heard much of Jesus' preaching. He taught with authority in the synagogue (Mk 1:21-22), although Mark does not include the content of that teaching. Yet, by saying that he has *more preaching* to do, right after performing many healings, Jesus reveals that his healing power is an integral part of his message and ministry. A foundational way that Jesus proclaims the message of the Gospel is through his acts of healing.

For nearly a year, we have endured Covid-19 and its global effects. Today's Gospel prompts us to honor, appreciate and thank the many people who have been healers in our midst, putting themselves in harm's way to lift up people who are ill. Unfortunately, over one million people globally have succumbed to the virus. But we must also recognize the tens of millions of people who have recovered, thanks in large part to the tireless efforts of medical professionals.

He cured many who were sick with various diseases. (Mk 1:34)

Praying With Scripture

What can you do to provide healing in your family and community?

Do you ask for help and healing when needed?

Are you intentional about seeking personal time for prayer?

Compassionate Care

SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B), FEBRUARY 14, 2021
READINGS: LV 13:1-46; PS 32; 1 COR 10:31-11:1; MK 1:40-45

Today's Gospel continues Mark's account of Jesus' ministry in Galilee. The reading offers a model for empathy and care for the sick.

The first reading, from Leviticus, presents background information about Israelite perspectives on leprosy. The term refers to a variety of contagious and noncontagious skin conditions broadly called leprosy in biblical texts. Leviticus 13 includes a detailed discussion of how priests analyze symptoms and examine skin to determine remedies. As they were not physicians, the depiction of priestly involvement reveals a belief that divine healing and ritual acts of purification were required for certain ailments.

The abbreviated account we hear in the first reading states that if the priests determine a disease to be leprous, the sick person should physically change his appearance to signal that he has the illness, wearing torn garments and disheveled hair. He should also vocally proclaim himself unclean and enter isolation. The rationale for

these actions was likely preservation of the community's health, assuming the disease was contagious even if it was not definitely known to be so. Likewise, wearing tattered garments and unkempt hair were practices associated with public mourning, so the leprous person might be revealing grief over the diagnosis. While the intent behind the acts was probably not to humiliate people, these practices were probably emotionally damaging to the afflicted. Jesus' interaction with a leprous person in the Gospel offers a more compassionate approach to caring for the sick.

At the start of his ministry, Jesus cures people with various diseases. Jesus encounters a leper who humbly asks for a healing if Jesus is willing to offer one. The Lectionary reading, and most other translations, affirm that Jesus, moved with pity, stretched out his hand, touched the person and verbally declared the disease to be cleaned. Some ancient manuscripts say that Jesus was moved with anger, which is a difficult reading that might suggest Jesus was angry at the disease for afflicting the person. Following the Lectionary rendering, Jesus' compassion and pity find support later in the Gospel when Jesus multiplies the loaves and fish because he felt compassion for the people who were hungry (Mk 6:34).

The manner in which Jesus interacts with this person is significant. As we heard last week, when Jesus healed the woman with fever, Jesus physically touches people who are sick. In today's Gospel, this has greater significance since there were taboos regarding ritual purity and contact with someone afflicted with leprosy. Jesus breaks these norms to offer physical touch as an element of healing. Jesus does follow the expected norm of having the healed person show himself to the priest and make an offering at the temple in gratitude for the blessing.

Notably, Jesus warns the man not to proclaim that he has been healed, which is a departure from the practice outlined in Leviticus, which required a public declaration of uncleanness. Such a declaration could be considered unnecessary since the skin was apparently healed. It could also reflect Jesus' hesitation about making his abilities known to the larger community at this point in his ministry. Jesus may be cautious, knowing that some would reject him, or he may want his power to be revealed at a deliberate pace, culminating with the resurrection. Despite Jesus' warning, the healed person opts to share the news freely, making Jesus even more popular with "people coming to him from everywhere."

The Gospel reminds us to treat all people, especially the sick, with dignity, care and respect. Shaming or humiliating the afflicted is never acceptable. Moreover, even if isolation is required to avoid the spread of disease, people should not be forgotten. Jesus' openness and compassionate touch are excellent examples for everyone, especially medical professionals, of how to interact with people in need of healing.

Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand [and] touched him. (Mk 1:41)

Praying With Scripture

What can you do to be a more compassionate person?

How do you treat people who are sick?

What in your life needs healing?

God's Creation

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT (B), FEBRUARY 21, 2021
READINGS: GN 9:8-15; PS 25; 1 PT 3:18-22; MK 1:12-15

Today is the first Sunday of Lent, the 40-day period in which we prepare ourselves mentally and physically for Easter, focusing on prayer, fasting, almsgiving and service to others. Today's readings invite us to reflect on God's loving relationship with all of creation.

In the first reading, we hear about the covenant that God makes with all living creatures, human and nonhuman animals together. This is called the Noahic covenant, as Noah is the central partner. In the context of the biblical narrative, the earth and nearly all of its inhabitants had been destroyed by flood. The destructive flood waters metaphorically wash away the corruption and sin of the earth, a cleansing the second reading interprets as similar to being washed in the waters of baptism. After the flood, the divine relationship with living creatures is affirmed using the legal language of covenant to express

God's commitment to creation's survival. The special interest in both human and nonhuman animal life is at the heart of the Noahic covenant and is remembered by the rainbow in the clouds. The beginning of Lent is an excellent time to reflect on the implications of this passage. God's love for creation is re-established in this covenant and should influence us to show love and care for all of creation.

The Gospel, too, highlights God's connection with creation, although it can be overlooked because there are several important elements in today's Gospel. Fittingly for the first Sunday of Lent, we hear of Jesus' 40 days of testing in the wilderness. Mark does not describe the nature of the temptations, which are expanded upon in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The duration of Jesus' wilderness experience becomes a model for the 40-day period of Lent, as the number is significant throughout biblical tradition as a time of prayer, testing and often transformation.

Mark describes Jesus being tempted by Satan, waited on by angels and among wild beasts. While obvious, it could be missed that each of these characters is not human. The New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham suggests that Jesus enters the wilderness in order to encounter beings of the nonhuman world in order to establish a relationship there before preaching to the human world. In his encounter with Satan, Jesus establishes his authority and ability to overcome temptations he might face beyond the wilderness. Jesus' relationship with angels is verified as positive and productive, as they offer him support. Jesus' living in the company of wild animals may signal that he has established a harmonious relationship with all creatures, even those often considered dangerous. Bauckham notes the importance of this peaceful relationship as an indicator of the messianic age. In the prophet Isaiah, for instance, a future messianic ruler would bring forth a time of peace between human and nonhuman animals (Is 11:6-9). By depicting Jesus with the animals, Mark signals that he has a relationship with all creatures and that he is the awaited messiah.

'I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants and with every living creature.' (Gn 9:9-10)

Praying With Scripture

What can you do to care for creation?

Do today's readings inspire you to change how you live?

How do you hope to grow and change during Lent?

As we embark on this Lenten journey, today's readings inspire us to be mindful and attuned to all of creation and the ways that we support or harm our fellow creatures. As creator, God shows love and affection for all living things, and we should imitate God in that regard. As Pope Francis reminds us, "All of us can cooperate as instruments of God for the care of creation" ("Laudato Si'," No. 14).

Seeking Clarity

SECOND SUNDAY OF LENT (B), FEBRUARY 28, 2021
READINGS: GN 22:1-18; PS 116; ROM 8:31-34; MK 9:2-10

The first reading and the Gospel are powerful and puzzling. Both are important narratives, but they often lead to more questions than answers. These texts remind us to read and reflect on Scripture, pray for clarity and be comfortable with the unknowability of some things.

In the first reading, we hear of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac, an act often interpreted as a sign of faith. After God enables Abraham and Sarah to have Isaac in their old age, God instructs Abraham to sacrifice him. This request seems counterintuitive to the biblical narrative since Isaac is the son of the covenant. Moreover and even more alarming, it is contrary to a parent's responsibility to protect a child and suggests that God desires human sacrifice. Yet, Abraham acquiesces, never questioning God's plan. This could reveal Abraham's commitment and understanding of Isaac as a blessing from God, or it could show his lack of regard for Isaac's life. Likewise, this might seem like an unreasonable test of faith that God sets for Abraham. As Abraham is about to sacrifice Isaac, God intercedes and substitutes a ram, an act often interpreted as a sign of divine disapproval of human sacrifice.

The theological and philosophical complexities have been debated for centuries and continue to pose chal-

lenges. Although Abraham demonstrates extreme faith and trust in God, his actions certainly should not be imitated. The narrative may present such a challenging request to emphasize the importance of devotion and obedience. The angel affirms this by declaring: "I know now how devoted you are to God, since you did not withhold from me your own beloved son."

The narrative is also a reminder to be open and attentive to God. On three occasions, Abraham responds, "*Hineni*" ("Here I am") in answer to God, Isaac and the angel. Recall the story of Samuel's prophetic call (read this year on the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time) and his multiple responses of *hineni*. While Abraham may not be a model of parental responsibility, he is a model for openness and acknowledgment of divine power. The story also offers notable parallels to God's sacrifice of Jesus, his only begotten son, a juxtaposition that is worthy of prayer and reflection especially during Lent.

In today's Gospel, we hear the story of the transfiguration, in which Jesus' physical appearance is transformed and his connection to the prophets Moses and Elijah is confirmed by a vision. The appearance of Elijah is particularly important as his return was expected to herald the Messiah. Likewise, according to tradition, Elijah did not die but ascended into heaven in a fiery whirlwind (2 Kings 2:1-12), a reference that could help Jesus' followers understand the resurrection.

Peter, James and John witness the Transfiguration and react with shock and awe. Peter suggests building three tents, which suggests that he wants to commemorate this location with moveable shrines. The apostles also hear a declaration from heaven that Jesus is the beloved Son of God, to whom they should listen, an echo from Jesus' baptism. At the end of the transfiguration, Jesus tells them not to reveal the event until after the resurrection, but the apostles are perplexed, "questioning what rising from the dead meant." The uncertainty of the apostles is refreshing, as the events that they witness are difficult to fully comprehend. As we continue our Lenten journey, we can be inspired by today's readings, which remind us that we are not alone in our quest for understanding and clarity, and we should invest time in critically studying and praying on Scripture.

They kept the matter to themselves, questioning what rising from the dead meant. (Mk 9:10)

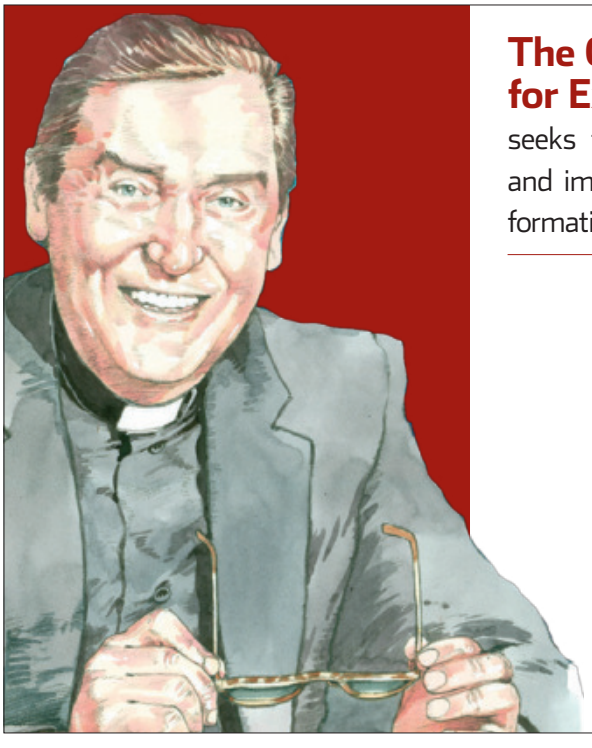
Praying With Scripture

Are you open to answering God's call?

Whom do you consult for guidance and clarity?

Does Scripture help you to pray and reflect on God?

Jaime L. Waters *teaches Scripture at DePaul University in Chicago. She is an associate professor of Catholic studies.*



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A Catholic Presidency

How faith will guide Joe Biden

By Tom Suozzi

I am excited by the prospects of a Biden presidency for many reasons. One reason is that his Catholic faith, much like President Kennedy's, will embolden him to ask for more from Americans. Catholic Democrats and most Americans applaud Mr. Biden's call to "restore the soul of America." We need now to put aside divisiveness and embrace a quest for the common good.

When Joseph R. Biden Jr. places his hand on his 1893 family Bible with a Celtic cross on its cover to recite the presidential oath, he inherits a "house divided against itself." We cannot defeat the deadly coronavirus, rebuild our economy, achieve social justice and repair our planet without choosing people over politics.

I serve as the vice chair of the bipartisan House Problem Solvers Caucus. We have already been working to build similar bipartisan relations in the Senate. The recent compromise Covid relief bill was a direct result of our efforts. Joe Biden knows this, and he brings to the White House 40 years of friendship, familiarity and fellowship on the Hill.

To accomplish his goals, President Biden will have to work with Democrats across a wide ideological spectrum and also seek common ground with Republicans. His relationship with God as a Catholic will help him. Educated by women religious, he attends church regularly, quotes Scripture and carries his son Beau's rosary at all times. His faith has sustained him through his many public and private triumphs and tragedies.

Reaching out across the aisle will hardly seem a stretch when "love thy neighbor" and the even more demanding "love your enemies" has been the truth for him his whole life. But make no mistake. Those who see Mr. Biden's gentle piety, reverence and compassion as some kind of weakness do not understand the power of Catholic core values. They pack a wallop.

While President Biden may not attempt on his first day to resolve some of the most challenging issues for Catholics in public life—such as abortion, conscience protections, sexuality and family issues—his main agenda, guided by core Catholic values, will help establish good will and make it more likely he can advance the common-ground dialogue that has eluded us for years.

Mr. Biden has said he will first focus on Covid-19 and will then turn his attention to economic recovery, racial equity and climate change. On those issues, Mr. Biden's policies align with the spirit of Catholic doctrine. For example, the church supports the dignity of work and the rights of workers, and for years, it has advocated for better health care. And so Mr. Biden's economic recovery plan will create millions of good-paying jobs, strengthen unions, and ensure that workers receive the pay, benefits and protections they deserve. He will also guarantee access to affordable, quality health care for all Americans.

In "Fratelli Tutti," Pope Francis condemned racism, calling it is a "virus that quickly mutates and instead of disappearing, goes into hiding and lurks in waiting." Mr. Biden will address racial disparities from health to policing, advancing economic equality, housing, education and a fairer criminal justice system.

Finally, in his encyclical "Laudato Si'," Pope Francis directed global leaders to address the climate change crisis. Joe Biden will care for God's creation. He will reverse current anti-environment policies, protect and preserve our natural resources, and rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement.

Jesus instructed his apostles: "Behold, I am sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be as shrewd as serpents and as simple as doves." So too with President Biden: The wolves in Washington will try to block him so they can protect their interests and preserve the status quo that has held the nation captive for years.

Yet Joe Biden will hold steadfast to his simple and straightforward values while using his experience and skills to beat the wolves and restore the soul of the nation.

Ad majorem Dei gloriam.

U.S. Representative Tom Suozzi *has represented New York's Third Congressional District since 2017.*

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